This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

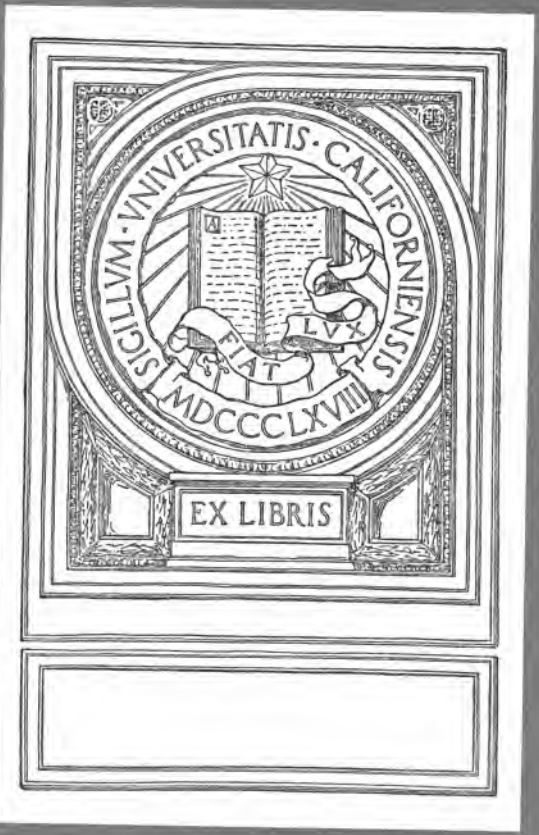
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE NAVY ETERNAL

which is

The Navy-that-Floats—The Navy-that-Flies and the Navy-under-the-sea

BY

"BARTIMEUS"

AUTHOR OF "THE LONG TRICK," ETC.

DRAWINGS BY DOUGLAS SWALE

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

Digitized by Google

COPYRIGHT, 1918,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google

TO

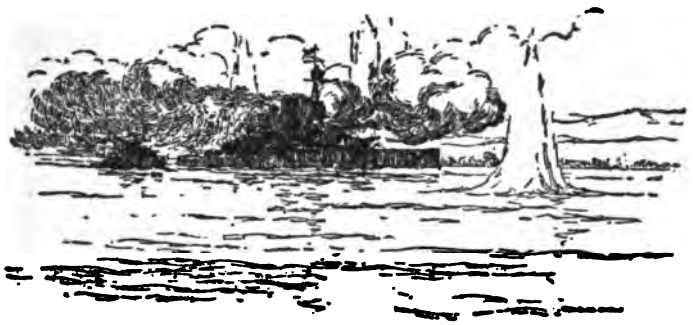
CAPTAIN GORDON CAMPBELL, V.C., D.S.O.

ROYAL NAVY

Digitized by Google

297100

Digitized by Google



CONTENTS

		PAGE
	PROLOGUE	13
CHAPTER I	"USQUE AB OVO"	19
II	IN THE TWILIGHT	41
III	THE NAVY-THAT-FLIES	77
IV	"LEST WE FORGET"	101
V	THE FEET OF THE YOUNG MEN	134
VI	GIPSIES OF THE SEA	141
VII	THE DAY—AND THE MORNING AFTER	155
VIII	THE NAVY-UNDER-THE-SEA	164
IX	THE PORT LOOK-OUT	184
X	THE SURVIVOR	190

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER PAGE

XI THE NTH BATTLE SQUADRON . . . 205

XII MYSTERY 222

XIII THE SPIRIT OF THE FLEET 236

XIV THE EPIC OF ST. GEORGE'S DAY, 1918 251

EPILOGUE 268

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"Usque ab Ovo"	19
Heavy Metal	41
A Striking Force	47
The Left Flank	54
The Hunt	60
Overdue	65
"Tuppence Apiece"	71
The Navy-that-Flies	77
The Dover Patrol	122
The Feet of the Young Men	139
Gipsies of the Sea	141
The Navy-Under-the-Sea	164
The Port Look-out	184
The Survivor	190
The Nth Battle Squadron	205

Digitized by Google

PAGE

THE SPIRIT OF THE FLEET 236

H. M. S. *VINDICTIVE* 251

EPILOGUE 268

FINIS 289

Digitized by Google

THE NAVY ETERNAL

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Univ of California

THE NAVY ETERNAL

PROLOGUE

ANYONE familiar with the River Dart knows the Mill Creek. The hills on either side slope steeply down to the edge of the water, oak and beech and elm clustering thick on the one hand, red plough, green shoots, and golden corn-fields alternating on the other through all the changing seasons.

The creek is tidal, transformed at half-flood into a fair expanse of shimmering water; at low tide, however, it dwindles to a score of meagre channels winding tortuously through whale-backed mud-banks, the haunt of scurrying crabs and meditative heron.

Here, one afternoon in midsummer some dozen years ago, came a gig (or, in local parlance, a "blue-boat") manned by seven flannel-clad cadets from the Naval College. Six sat on the thwarts pulling lazily against the last of the ebb. The seventh sat in the stern, with the yoke-lines over his shoulders, refreshing himself with cherries out of a bag.

As they approached the shelving mud-banks, pur-

Digitized by Google

ple in the afternoon sunlight, the figure in the bows boated his oar and began to sound cautiously with his boathook. The remaining five oarsmen glanced back over their shoulders and continued paddling. The helmsman smiled tolerantly, as a man might smile at the conceits of childhood, but refrained from speech. They all knew the weakness of the bowman for dabbling in mud.

"Half a point to port!" said the slim form wielding the dripping boathook. "I can see the channel now. . . . Steady as you go!" A minute later the boat slid into the main channel and the crew drew in their oars, punting their narrow craft between the banks of ooze. None of them spoke, save the bowman, and he only at rare intervals, flinging back a curt direction to the helmsman over his shoulder.

For half an hour they navigated the channels winding up the valley, and came at length to a crumbling stone quay beside the ruin of a mill. Ferns grew in the interstices of the old brickwork, and a great peace brooded over the silent wood that towered behind. They made the boat fast there; and because boats and the sea were things as yet half-unknown and wholly attractive, none of them attempted to land. Instead, with coats rolled up as pillows and their straw hats tilted over their eyes, the seven made themselves comfortable as only naval cadets could in such cramped surroundings, and from under the thwarts each one drew a paper bag and a bottle of lemonade.

Digitized by Google

"Dead low water," said Number 1 (the bow oar) presently. "We shall have a young flood against us going back; but then there's no chance of getting stuck on the mud." He drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and proceeded to take careful soundings round the boat, using the keys as a sinker and the lanyard as a lead-line.

"Oh, shut up about your everlasting tides," said Number 2, "and keep quiet; I want to sleep."

"They interest me," replied Number 1 simply. "I shall be a navigator, I think."

"You'd better go in for submarines," said Number 4, applying himself to his bottle of fizzing beverage. "Plenty of poking about mudbanks in them if it interests you. One of the first we ever had stuck in the mud one day and never came up again."

"P'raps I shall," admitted the bow. "In fact I shouldn't be surprised if I *did* go in for submarining."

Number 3 was lying on his back on the thwart, his head resting on the gunwale. "They'll never come to anything," he said. "The submarine's a failure." His eyes followed the flight of a white-winged gull that circled with outstretched wings far above their heads. "No. It's going to be in the air, when we have a war. I'm all for flying machines. . . ." He was silent awhile meditating, then turned his head quickly. "Bombs!" he said. "Fancy being able to drop bombs all over an enemy's country."

"You couldn't do it," said Number 2. "You'd go

Digitized by Google

killing women and civilians. They'd never let you."

"Who?" demanded the prospective aviator, his enthusiasm rather damped. "Who'd stop me?"

"International Law," cut in the coxswain quickly. "Conventions and all that. . . . Why, there'd be no limit to anything if it weren't for international law. An enemy could go off in his beastly submarine and paralyse the trade routes."

"Paralyse 'em—how?" inquired the bow man.

"Just torpedoing 'em, of course, you ass."

"What, merchant ships?"

The jurist nodded.

"But no one could do that. I mean you'd never get a naval officer to do that, international law or no international law. That 'ud be piracy—like those fellows at Algiers. 'Member the lecture last week?"

"I don't mean *we'd* do it," conceded the coxswain. "But some nations might."

The idealist shook his head. "No naval officer would," he repeated stoutly, "whatever his nationality."

"The surface of the sea's good enough for me," chipped in No. 2. "I don't want to bomb women or torpedo merchant ships. I'm going to be captain of a destroyer." He raised his head. "Thirty knots at night, my boy! . . . Upper-deck torpedo tubes and all that. . . ."

"I'd blow you out of the water with a 12-inch gun," said Number 5, speaking for the first time, and laying aside a magazine. "Gunnery is going to

Digitized by Google

save this country if ever we have a war. That's why gunnery lieutenants get promoted quickly—my governor told me so."

"Did he?" said the stroke oar. "He's wrong. You can only fire big guns from big ships, and you know what happened to big ships in the Russo-Japanese war."

"What?" inquired the visionary coldly.

"Mines. Big ships can't move when there are mines about."

"We don't use mines any longer," said the coxswain, crumpling up his empty bag and throwing it over the side. It floated slowly past the boat towards the head of the valley. "They're not considered sporting. 'Sides, even if you could, you can always countermine, and sweep 'em up. My brother went through a course in the Mediterranean once—place called Platea. I remember him telling me about it."

The stroke oar sat upright and glanced the length of the boat. "Wouldn't it be a rum thing," he said, "if there was a war some day and we were all in it." He ticked off their names on his fingers: "Submarine, aeroplane, destroyer, minelayer, minesweeper, battleship——" He paused. "I'd like to be in a cruiser," he said. "A big cruiser scouting ahead of the Fleet. You'd get more excitement there than anywhere." His voice deepened to a sudden note of triumph. "It 'ud be the forefront of the battle."

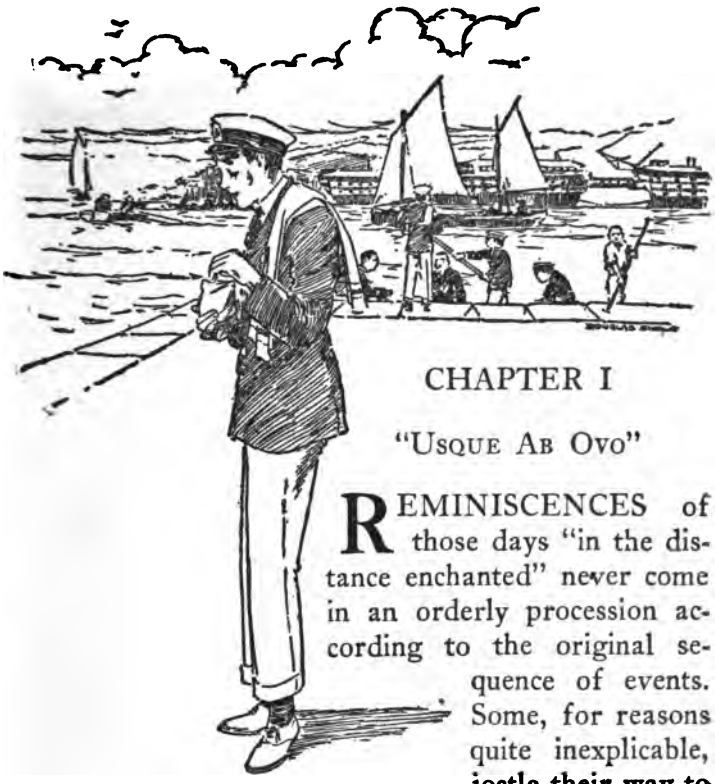
"Then we'd all meet afterwards," said Number 2, "and have a blow-out somewhere ashore and talk

Digitized by Google

about our experiences. Wouldn't that be topping?"

The bow oar sat with his eyes on the crumpled paper bag that floated up-stream, shading them against the glow of the sun turning all the creeks into molten gold. "Those of us that were left," he said dreamily. "Tide's turned. . . . We'd better think about getting back."

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER I

"Usque Ab Ovo"

REMINISCENCES of those days "in the distance enchanted" never come in an orderly procession according to the original sequence of events. Some, for reasons quite inexplicable, jostle their way to the fore readily enough. Others, dim and elusive, hover in the background, and only respond to the lure of firelight and tobacco smoke ascending incense-wise from the depths of the arm-chair.

Sooner or later, though, they can all be caught and held for the moment needed to record them. The difficulty is to know where to start. . . .

Harker is foremost among the "thrusters" in the

Digitized by Google

surging crowd of memories of the old *Britannia* days. Harker, with his piercing, rather melancholy eyes, his black beard and tattooed wrists, and his air of implacable ferocity that for months succeeded in concealing from his term a heart as tender as a woman's.

His name was not actually Harker, of course; but he is probably still alive, and even retired chief petty officers of the Royal Navy have their susceptibilities. He was a term C.P.O.—mentor, wet-nurse, "sea-daddy," the outward and visible embodiment of Naval Discipline to sixty-odd naval cadets who yesterday were raw schoolboys and to-day wear the King's uniform and eke brass buttons—a transition unhinging enough to more matured souls than those of his charges.

How he succeeded in conveying within the space of the first evening the exceedingly unfamiliar routine of training-ship life, the art of turning into a hammock, the necessity for keeping their chests locked, the majesty of the term lieutenant and the omnipotence of the chief cadet captains, to sixty bewildered fifteen-year-olds, only he knows.

Yet he harried none; they were conscious of him as a flock of disconcerted sheep are aware of a wise collie. His voice was never still: it was to be presumed that he slept at some mysterious time during the twenty-four hours, and yet his square, compact form seemed to be always drifting about at all hours of the day and night. Even when a hapless wight

Digitized by Google

(in the throes of nightmare) tipped bodily out of his hammock on to the deck the first night, it was Harker who appeared noiselessly out of the shadows to tuck him in again.

Their names he had pat within twenty-four hours; this tightened his grip of the term instantly, but it also caused him to be regarded as scarcely canny. Indeed, it was disconcerting enough to regard yourself one moment as an insignificant and unknown unit among 250 others, and in this comfortable reflection to lean in a *dégagé* attitude against the white paintwork (one of the seven deadly sins): then to hear admonition and your name, coupled together like chain-shot, ring out along the crowded main-deck. Harker had seen you.

There were other C.P.O.'s on board: each term owned one. But they were, by comparison with Harker, sorry fellows. One was reputed to be given to beating the big drum at Salvation Army meetings ashore, garbed, moreover, in a scarlet jersey. Hotly his term denied it, but the story was stamped with the unimpeachable authority of the boatswain's mate of the lower-deck: a godless seaman, conversation with whom, being of a spicy and anecdotal nature, was forbidden.

Another was admittedly of a good enough heart, but a sentimentalist, and consequently to be despised. On the occasion of the chastisement of an evil-doer, his was the arm chosen to administer the strokes with all the pomp and circumstance of an official

Digitized by Google

execution. He laid the strokes on well and truly—that much the victim himself admitted. But when he turned from his duty his eyes were observed to have tears in them. His term had in consequence to adopt an apologetic manner for a considerable time afterwards.

It was a similar scene, but one in which Harker played the Lord High Executioner, that must here be recorded. The setting alone was sufficient to strike awe and even terror into the spectator's hearts. And now, after the lapse of years, recalling the circumstances of that harrowing quarter of an hour, it is doubtful whether there was not just some such motive behind the grim circumstance that led up to the painful consummation.

The scene was the orlop-deck. What light there was came in through the open gun-ports, slanting upwards off the water. Not cheering sunlight, you understand, but a greenish sickly gleam that struggled ineffectually with the shadows clinging like vampires among the low oak beams overhead.

The victim's term were fallen-in in a hollow square about the horse—a block of wood supported on short legs, with ring-bolts and canvas straps hanging from each corner. Then there came a pause. Possibly the captain had not finished his breakfast; or perhaps Harker had for once made a mistake and got his term there too early. But for the space of several minutes (or weeks, or years) the term stood in shuddering contemplation of this engine.

Digitized by Google

Then one of the spectators, the victim of either an over-rich imagination or an acutely sensitive conscience, dramatically fainted and was borne forth. After that things began to happen. The malefactor appeared, accompanied by Harker. The captain, the term lieutenant, and (a thrill ran through the onlookers) the surgeon followed. It was half-expected that the chaplain would also join the group and administer ghostly consolation to the culprit, who, it must be reluctantly admitted, looked rather pleased with himself.

His offence was not one to alienate him from the hearts of his fellows. If memory serves aright, he had been overheard to refer to his late crammer in terms that may or may not have been just, but were certainly not the way a little gentleman should talk. But his term—or most of them—were still smarting under the recollections of crammers' methods and were disposed to regard the delinquent's lapse rather more as a pardonable ebullition of feeling than a breach of morality. In short he was a bit of a hero.

"Chief Petty Officer Harker," said the stern voice of the term lieutenant, "do your duty." The harrowing preliminaries completed, Chief Petty Officer Harker did it, as was to be expected of him, uncommonly well.

The victim took it, as was also to be expected of him, uncommonly well. It was not long before these lines were written that he was called upon to meet a sterner and his last ordeal. The pity is that

Digitized by Google

no spectator can bear testimony to the worthier courage with which he must have met it.

Harker it was who smelt out, like a Zulu witch-doctor, the grass snake and dormouse that lived a life of communistic ease and reflection in the washing till of someone's sea-chest. Harker's the suspicious mind that led to official "ruxes" of private tills, and the confiscation of meerschaum pipes, Turkish cigarettes, and other contraband. Yet all this without any effect of espionage.

The nearest approach to active espionage that Harker permitted himself was hovering in the vicinity of the gangway when the terms were landed for daily recreation. The law of the Medes and Persians had it that during cold weather all cadets not playing games must land wearing a particularly despicable form of under-garment: a woolly and tucked-into-the-socks abomination that the soul of every right-minded cadet revolted from. As the procession passed under the low gangway on its way to the launches alongside, Harker, lurking in the vicinity, would suddenly pounce upon a suspect.

"'Ave we got our DRAWERS on, Mr. So-and-so?" came the merciless query. The progress of the procession was arrested while Mr. So-and-so racked his brains for some suitable parry to this very leading question. A damning negative having eventually been extorted, the underclad one was hauled from the ranks and given three minutes in which to get to his chest, extract from his wardrobe the garment

Digitized by Google

that found such high favour in Olympian eyes, put it on, and rejoin the tail of the procession. Thus a first offender; a second offence resulted in "no landing." There was no appeal.

The muddy, tired, ever-hungry throng that returned some three hours later again passed on board under this lynx-eyed surveillance. This time illicit "stodge" was the subject of Harker's unquenchable suspicions.

Smuggling stodge on board (another of the seven deadly sins) required considerable ingenuity, owing to the ban the authorities thought necessary to impose on pockets. Regular outfitters pandered to this Olympian whim, and constructed trousers with an embryonic fob just large enough to hold a few coins. The unorthodox, who arrived with garments bearing the stamp of provincialism and pockets, were bidden to surrender them forthwith, and stout fingers ruthlessly sewed the pockets up.

The jacket had only one, a breast pocket already congested by keys, handkerchief, letters from home, pet bits of indiarubber, and the like. Remained therefore the despised garment already alluded to. This, being tucked—by official decree—into the wearer's socks, formed an admirable hold-all for a packet of butterscotch—worked flat—a snack of Turkish Delight, or a peculiar and highly favoured form of delicacy known as "My Queen."

With a not too saintly expression, an unflinching eye, and a sufficiently baggy pair of trousers, the

Digitized by Google

contrabandist might count on a reasonable amount of success. But Harker's X-ray glance rarely failed him.

That stern, incisive voice would rivet all eyes upon the culprit just when the muster by the officer of the day had been completed, and the long ranks awaited the stentorian dismissal of the chief cadet captain.

"Mr. Z! You'll step along to the sick-bay when we falls out."

The blanched smuggler clutched at his momentarily abandoned halo of rectitude.

"Sick-bay!" he echoed indignantly. "Why the sick-bay? There's nothing wrong with me—I swear there isn't. I never felt better in my life."

"That there nasty swelling on your shin," was the pitiless reply, "did ought to be seen to at once. A draught, that had fluttered the carefully selected baggy trousers against their wearer's legs, had been his undoing. The game was up.

Like all truly great men, Harker could unbend without discipline suffering an iota. As the months passed and his term of fledgling "News" acquired the modest dignity of "Threes" (second-term cadets), Harker's methods changed. He was no longer the detective, inquisitor, encyclopædia of a thousand unfamiliar phrases, events, and objects. His term were on their feet now, treading in their turn paths fiercely illumined by the new first term's gaping admiration and curiosity. They were an example.

Digitized by Google

"'Ow long 'ave we been in the *Britannia*?" he would demand reproachfully when some breach of the laws called for reproof. "'Ere we are in our second term, an' talkin' about HUP-STAIRS!"

The scorn in his voice was like a whiplash.

"When you young gentlemen goes to sea you won't find no STAIRS!"

When they went to sea! That was the gradually increasing burden of his song. For a while it presented a picture too remote almost for serious contemplation. It was practically a figure of speech, meaningless. But as time went on, and the successive dignities of "Sixer" and "Niner" (third and fourth—the last—terms) loomed up and passed into reality, and at last the Great Wall of the final examination alone stood between them and the sea-going gunrooms of the Fleet, the words took on their real significance.

Harker abandoned even sarcasm. He became guide, philosopher, and friend, a patient mentor always accessible—generally somewhere on the chest-deck—in leisure hours to thirsters after knowledge. Was one shaky in that branch of nautical lore known as "Bends and Hitches"? Harker's blunt fingers tirelessly manipulated the end of a hammock-lashing until the pupil could make even a "sheep-shank" with his eyes shut.

Another would bring him, in a welter of grease and ravelled strands, a tortured mass of hemp-rope.

"It's meant to be a Long Splice," was the explana-

Digitized by Google

tion, "but I don't seem to get it right—ever," and with a despondent sigh it would be thrust into Harker's hands.

Harker would examine the interwoven strands, twisting it to and fro with jerks of his powerful wrists, pulling taut here, tucking something in there, and lo! the thing took shape.

"This is where you goes wrong, Mr. P., every time!" (Recollect there were sixty-odd in his term.) "Don't forget what I'm always telling you. You splits the middle strands, and then an over-'and knot in the opposite 'alves. . . ." It always looked so easy when Harker did it.

It was during the last night on board that Harker rose to heights truly magnanimous. The fourth term regarded it as its right and privilege, on the last night of the term, to hold high carnival until sleep overtook them. Cadet captains even cast their responsibilities to the winds that night and scampered about, slim, pyjama-clad figures, in the dim light of the lanters, ruthlessly cutting down the prig who yearned for slumber, lashing-up a victim in his hammock and leaving him upside-down to reflect on certain deeds of the past year that earned him this retribution, floating about on gratings on the surface of the plunge baths, and generally celebrating in a fitting manner the eve of the day that was to herald in new responsibilities and cares.

Harker, who for fifteen months had haunted the shadows on the look-out for just such a "rux," whose

Digitized by Google

ear caught every illicit sound—even the crunch of the nocturnal butterscotch—Harker was for once unseeing and unseen. It needed but this crowning act of grace to endear him for ever to his departing flock.

Yet he had one more card to play, and played it as he passed in farewell from carriage to carriage of the departing train. Further, he dealt it with accentuated emphasis for the benefit of those he thought needed the reminder most.

"Gosh!" ejaculated such a one when Harker passed to the next carriage: he flopped back on to his seat. "Did you hear? He said 'sir!' to each one of us when he said good-bye!"

So much for Harker. But he brought with him a number of other memories entangled somehow about his personality, and on these it may be as well to enlarge a little ere they slip back into the limbo of the forgotten past.

It says much for the vividness of Harker's personality that he outran in these reminiscences the memory of "Stodge." Certainly few interests loomed larger on the horizon of these days than the contents of the two canteens ashore.

There was one adjacent to the landing-place: a wise forethought of the authorities, enabling a fellow to stay his stomach during the long climb from the river to the playing fields, where the principal canteen stood.

"Stodge" was of a surpassing cheapness. That

Digitized by Google

much was essential when the extent of the weekly pocket-money was limited (if memory is to be trusted) to one shilling. Further it was of a pleasing variety, certain peculiar combinations, hallowed by tradition, being alone unchanging.

Of these the most popular was the "Garry Sandwich." Components: a half-stick of chocolate cream sandwiched between two "squashed-fly" biscuits; the whole beaten thin with a cricket-bat, gymnasium shoe, or other implement handy. The peculiarity of this particular form of dainty was that it sufficed as an unfailing bribe wherewith to open negotiations with one Dunn, the septuagenarian keeper of the pleasure boats. The moral atmosphere of the boat-house, in consequence of its custodian's sweetness of tooth, came in time to resemble that of a Chinese yamen.

Another delicacy about which legend clustered was the "Ship's Bun," split in half, with a liberal cementing of Devonshire cream and strawberry jam oozing out at the sides. Concerning the bun itself, the maternal solicitude of the authorities extended one gratis to each cadet ashore on half-holidays lest the impecunious should hunger unnecessarily between lunch and tea. The buns were obtainable on application at the counter, whence the daughter of the proprietor—whom we will call Maunder—was charged with the duty of issuing them.

How she pretended to remember the two and a half hundred faces that presented themselves in

Digitized by Google

surging crowds round the counter at 4 p.m. is more than her present recorder can say. But even as she extended a bun to the outstretched grubby hand of a suppliant, an expression of vixen-like indignation and cunning would transform her features.

"You've 'ad a bun afore!" she would snap shrilly, withdrawing the bounty in the nick of time. The hungry petitioner, cheerfully acknowledging defeat in a game of bluff, would then withdraw, pursued by Miss Maunder's invective.

All the same she was not infallible, and on occasions hot protestations and even mutual recrimination rang to and fro across the counter. Appeal, ultimately carried to Mr. Maunder, was treated in much the same way as it is by croupiers at Monte Carlo. A gentleman's word is his word. But it is as well not to be the victim of too many mistakes.

Maunder, who was occupied with the stern responsibility of catering for the whim of the rich, had a way of recapitulating the orders from the beginning, adding up aloud as the count went on, thus:

Cadet: A strawberry ice, please, Maunder.

Maunder: One strawberry ice tuppence.

Cadet: Oh, and a doughnut, while you're about it.

Maunder: One strawberry ice one doughnut thruppence.

Cadet: That's just to go on with. Then in a bag I want a stick of cream chocolate——

Maunder: One strawberry ice one doughnut one stick cream chocolate fourpence.

Digitized by Google

Cadet: (breathlessly) And a bottle of barley sugar and a "My Queen" and four Gary biscuits and half a pound of cherries and a bottle of lemonade and one of ginger beer and—that's all, I think.

Maunder: (coming in a little behind, chanting, the general effect being that of a duet in canon) One strawberry ice one doughnut one stick cream chocolate one bottle barley sugar one "My Queen," etc., etc., etc. . . . *And* a bag one an thruppence 'a'-penny. . . . Thank you, sir. Next, please.

On occasion demigods walked among the children of men. The visits of the Channel Fleet to Torbay usually brought over one or two of a lately departed term, now midshipmen by the grace of God and magnificent beyond conception.

It was their pleasure, these immaculately clad visitors, to enter the canteen, greet Maunder with easy familiarity and Miss Maunder with something approaching gallantry, slap down a sovereign on the counter and cry free stodge all round. They would even unbend further, dallying with a strawberry ice in token of their willingness to be as other men, and finally depart in a cloud of cigarette smoke and hero-worship.

This record is not concerned with the fact that on their return on board their ship, some hours later, one suffered stripes for having forgotten to lock his chest before he went ashore, and the other, being the most junior of all the junior midshipmen, was

Digitized by Google

bidden swiftly to unlace the sub's boots and fetch his slippers.

To every dog his day.

Random memories such as these necessarily present individuals and incidents, not in the sequence of their importance in the cosmos as one sees it now, but as they appeared to the vision of the Naval Cadet, whose world was an amiable chaos.

Thus the Captain flickers through this kaleidoscope an awesome bearded figure, infinitely remote from the small affairs of that teeming rabbit-warren of youth. More readily comes to mind the picture of his lady wife, white-haired, with clear eyes and gentle voice, a memory somehow entangled with geraniums in red pots about the high-moulded stern-gallery and tea on Sunday afternoons in the spacious chintz-draped after-cabin: with irksome football sprains, and brief puerile illnesses made more endurable by her visits to the cotside.

The Commander, though less awesome than the Captain, approached the mortal in that he stooped at times to wrath. His was the cold eye before which the more hardened malefactors quailed; his the rasping voice that jerked the four terms to attention at Divisions each morning:

"Young Gentlemen, 'shun!"

The English public schoolboy is conscious of youth, and takes the fact of being a gentleman for granted. But to hear himself addressed by a designation that combined both qualities was a never-

Digitized by Google

staling subject for inward mirth and a weird self-congratulation difficult of analysis. It conveyed a hint of coming manhood and responsibilities: it was the voice of the Navy, bending on the leading strings, heard for the first time.

But on a plane far nearer earth stood the Term Lieutenants, each one the god and hero, the Big Brother of his term. That they, their Boxer or South African medal ribbons, their tattoo-marks, County or International caps, biceps, and all the things that were theirs, were the objects of their respective Term's slavish adulation, goes without saying. Bloody encounters between their self-appointed champions over an adverse criticism or doubt cast upon a forgotten word were not unknown. Two entire terms once joined battle and bled each other's noses the length and breath of the echoing "Skipper Woods" to clinch some far-flung argument as to the merits of their respective "Loots."

There were but four Term Lieutenants, and they were picked from the wardrooms of the whole Navy. Small wonder some three hundred grubby urchins fresh from school found in them admirable qualities.

They were the moulds into which, year by year, the molten metal of the Navy's officer-personnel was poured, thence to be scattered about the seven seas, tempered by winds and stress, and, in God's good time, tested to the uttermost.

Ashore, on the playing fields or across the red ploughland at the tails of the beagles, they laboured

Digitized by Google

in close intimate fellowship with these atoms of clay thrust by providence beneath their thumbs. But on board it seemed they faded from ken, being rarely seen save at classes and musters, or when in pairs the Term percolated through the wardroom for dessert, plastered as to the hair, patent leather shod, to sip and cough over a glass of ambrosial port at either elbow of their Lieutenant.

Seeing and unseen, knowing their Terms as only men who spend their lives among men can know and understand the embryo, they were the guiding invisible wisdom behind the Cadet Captains, who outwardly ruled the decks.

The Cadet Captains were chosen from the three senior Terms, set apart from their fellows by the fact that they wore "standup" collars and a triangular gold badge on the left cuff.

Minor Authority in other guises was greeted much the same as it is in all communities of boyhood. The platitudes of notice boards no fellow with his heart in the right place could be expected to remember over well. The acknowledged sway of instructors and masters was largely a matter of knowing to a nicety how far an adventurous spirit could go (in the realms of Science and Freehand Drawing it was a long way) before the badgered pedagogue turned and bit. Terms paid strict allegiance to their own Chief Petty Officers. But, as has already been shown, this was an affair of the heart and the senti-

Digitized by Google

ments. He was theirs, and they were his: thus it had been from the beginning.

There was, however, one voice that rarely repeated an order, one court from which appeal, if possible, was undreamed of—that of the Cadet Captain. Their rule was without vexatious tyranny, but it was an iron rule. The selection of these Cadet Captains was done carefully, and mistakes were few. The standard of the whole was no mean one, and for three months the Lieutenant of the First Term had been studying the raw material, working with it, playing with it, talking to it—or rather listening while it talked to him. . . . Thus Cadet Captains were chosen, and the queer eager loyalty with which the rest paid them allegiance was the first stirring of the quickened Naval Spirit, foreshadowing that strange fellowship to be, brotherhood of discipline and control, of austerity and a half-mocking affectionate tolerance.

To the Cadet Captains perhaps can be attributed the passage, almost untarnished through the years, of the Britannia traditions. They were concerned, these youthful Justices of the Peace, with more than the written law. If they enforced right enough, but with a tolerance one might expect of fifteen summers administering the foibles and rules of fifty. On the other hand, did a "new" unbutton a single button of his monkey jacket, a "Three" deign to swing his keys, a "Sixer" to turn up his trousers or tilt his cap on the back of his head (the prerogative

Digitized by Google

of the "Niner" or Fourth Term), and Nemesis descended upon him ere he slept that night. Nemesis, by virtue of its unblemished character and the favour its triangular badge found in the eyes of the gods, was allowed to turn in half an hour after the remainder. It occupied itself during this time in guzzling cocoa and biscuits smeared with strawberry jam provided for its delectation by the authorities—though the cost was said to be defrayed by the parents of the common herd relegated to hammocks and the contemplation of this orgy out of one drowsy though envious eye.

Biscuits finished, Nemesis would draw from his pocket a knotted "togie" of hemp, and, having removed traces of jam from his features, proceed to administer summary justice in the gloom where the hammocks swung.

It was of course grossly illegal and stigmatised by the authorities as "a pernicious system of private and unauthorised punishments." But the alternative was open to any who cared to appeal to Cæsar. Appealing to Cæsar meant spending subsequent golden afternoons on the parade ground, swinging a heavy bar bell to the time of "Sweet Dreamland Faces" blared out on a cornet by a bored bandsman.

So summary justice ruled, and it ruled in this wise:

"Shove your knuckles outside that blanket—you needn't pretend to be asleep——"

Chorus of snores deafening in their realism and

Digitized by Google

self-conscious rectitude from the wrongdoer's neighbours.

"You were slack attending belly-muster[1] for the third time running——"

"I swear——"

"You's better not. You'll get six more for swearing——"

"Ow!"

"*Don't* make such a rux. . . ."

"Ow!"

"If you yell you'll get double."

"Ow!"

"That's for being slack. Now the other hand. . . . That's for 'nerving'" (modernised = swanking) "with your thumbs in your beckets——"

"Ow!"

"*Shut* up! Stick your knuckles out properly."

"I swear I didn't—ow! . . . Good night."

. . . . . .

Memories, ah, memories! Haphazard but happy as only the far-off things can seem, half revealed through the mists of years. Grim old cradle of the Eternal Navy, there lies on my desk a blotting-pad hewed from your salt timbers; it may be some whimsical ghost strayed out of it to provoke these random recollections. Does it, I wonder, ever unite with

[1] "Belly-muster," as its name gracefully implies, was a parade of lightly clad suspects in procession past the sick bay while the lynx-eyed surgeon scanned each brisket for traces of incipient chicken-pox rash.

Digitized by Google

other ghosts from chiselled garden-seat or carved candle-stick, and there on the moonlit waters of the Dart refashion, rib by rib, keel and strake and stem-post, a Shadow Ship?

And what of the Longshoremen Billies that plied for hire between the shore and the aftergangway—Johnnie Farr (whom the Good Lawd durstn't love), Hannaford of the wooden leg, and all the rest of that shell-backed fraternity? Gone to the haven of all good ships and sailormen: and only the night wind abroad beneath the stars, whispers to the quiet hills the tales of sharks and pirates and the Chiny seas that once were yours and ours.

But what familiar faces throng once more the old decks and cluster round the empty ports! Is it only to fond memory that you seemed the cheeriest and noblest, or did some beam of the Glory to be yours stray out of the Hereafter and paint your boyish faces thus, O best-remembered from those far-off days?

You crowd too quickly now, you whose fair name is legion, so that the splendour of your sacrifices blur and intermingle. The North Sea knows you and the hidden Belgian minefields; the Aurora Borealis was the candle that lit some to bed, and the surf on the beaches of Gallipoli murmurs to others a never-ending lullaby. Ostend and Zeebrugge will not forget you, and the countless tales of your passing shall be the sword hilt on which our children shall cut their children's teeth.

Digitized by Google

From out of that Shadow Ship lying at her moorings off the old Mill Creek comes the faint echoes of your boyish voices floating out across the placid tide. Could we but listen hard enough we might catch some message of good cheer and encouragement from you who have had your day:

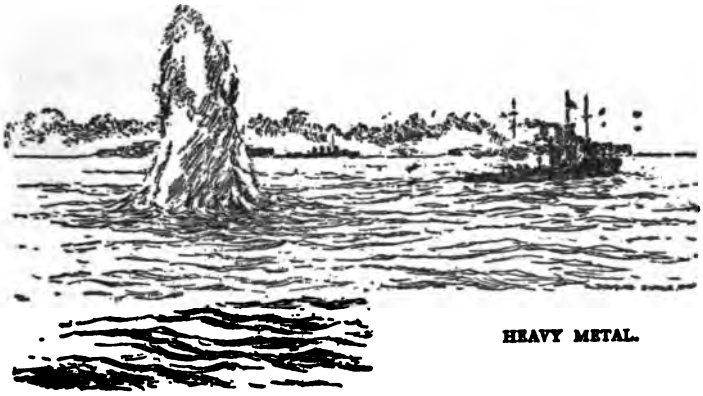
"We are the Dead. . . .

. . . . .

To you with failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high:
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep. . . ."

There shall be no faith broken. God rest you, merry Gentlemen.

Digitized by Google



HEAVY METAL.

CHAPTER II

In the Twilight

I. HEAVY METAL

IT was still dark when the battle cruisers slipped from their moorings and began to feel their way towards the unseen entrance of the harbour. From the bridge of each mass of towering indeterminate shadows the stern light of the next ahead could be discerned dimply through binoculars, and on those pin-points of light they steered. What the battle cruiser flagship steered by, in the narrow confines of the crowded harbour and the inky darkness, only the little knot of figures on her forebridge knew: the admiral and flag captain, the navigator and officer-of-the-watch, muffled in duffle coats and moving

Digitized by Google

mysteriously about the glow-worm arc of light from the binnacle and chart-table.

One by one the long black shapes slid through the outer defences, ebon shadows in a world of shades. The voices of the leadsmen in the chains blended their mournful intermittent chant with the rush of water past the ship's side; but in the ears of the watchful figures on the bridges the sound was swallowed by the dirge of the funnel stays and halliards in the cold wind heralding the dawn.

The red and green lights on the gate-marking vessels winked and bobbed in the swell caused by the passage of the grim host. It passed with incredible swiftness; and before the troubled waters began to quiet, the escorting destroyers came pelting up astern, heralded by the rush and rattle of spray-thrashed steel, funnels glowing, and the roar of their fans pouring out from the engine-room exhausts. Night and the mystery of the darkness enfolded them. The gates closed upon their churning wakes and the tumult of their passing. Dawn glimmered pale behind the hills and broadened slowly into day; it found the harbour empty, save for small craft. Beyond the headlands, beyond the mist-enshrouded horizon, the battle cruisers were abroad, unleashed.

Once clear of their protecting minefields, the battle cruisers moved south at high speed, with their smoke trailing astern in broad zig-zags across a grey sky. At intervals they altered course simultaneously and then swung back to their original path, flinging

Digitized by Google

the grey seas asunder from each gaunt, axe-headed bow as they turned.

They scarcely resembled ships, in their remorseless, purposeful rush under the lowering sky. The screening T.B.D.'s spread fan-wise on their flanks were dwarfed to insignificance beside these stupendous destroyers with the smoke pouring from their huge funnels, and nothing to break their stark nakedness of outline but the hooded guns. Men lived on board them, it is true: under each White Ensign a thousand souls laboured out each one its insignificant destiny. They were entities invisible like mites in a cheese; but the ships that bore them were instruments, visible enough, of the triumphant destiny of an empire.

As far as the eye could reach, the battle cruisers were alone on that grey waste of water. But swift as was their passage, something swifter overtook them out of the north as the morning wore on. It was the voice of the battle fleet moving south in support. "Speed so-and-so, on such-and-such a course," flickered the curt cipher messages through sixty miles of space. And south they came in battle array, battleships, light cruisers, and destroyers, ringed by the misty horizon of the North Sea, with the calling gulls following the white furrows of their keels like crows after the plough.

A division of light cruisers, driving through the crested seas at the speed of a galloping horse, linked the battle fleet with the battle cruisers. Seen from

Digitized by Google

either force they were but wraiths of smoke on the horizon: but ever and anon a daylight searchlight winked out of the mist, spanning the leagues with soundless talk.

It was still early afternoon when a trail of bubbles flickered ahead of the flagship of the battle fleet's lee line. It crossed at right angles to their course, and a thousand yards abeam of the third ship in the line something silvery broke the surface in a cloud of spray. It was a torpedo that had run its course and had missed the mark. Simultaneously, one of the escorting destroyers, a mile abeam, turned like a mongoose on a snake, and circled questing for a couple of minutes. Then suddenly a column of water leaped into the air astern of the destroyer, and the sound of the explosion was engulfed by the great loneliness of sea and sky. She remained circling while the battle fleet swept on with swift, bewildering alterations of course, and later another far-off explosion overtook them.

"Strong smell of oil; air bubbles. No wreckage visible. Consider enemy submarine sunk. No survivors," blinked the laconic searchlight, and the avenger, belching smoke from four raking funnels, came racing up to her appointed station.

As the afternoon wore on, a neutral passenger ship crossed the path of the fleet. She was steering a westerly course, and altered to pass astern of the battle cruisers.

The captain wiped his glasses and handed them

Digitized by Google

to one of the passengers, an amiable merchant of the same nationality as himself, and a self-confessed admirer of all things British.

"Ha!" said the captain. "You see? The clenched fist of Britain! It is being pushed under the nose of Germany—so!" He laughingly extended a gnarled fist in the other's face. The merchant was a frequent passenger of his, and the sort of man (by reason of his aforesaid proclivities) to appreciate the jest. The merchant stepped back a pace rather hurriedly: then he laughed loudly. "Exactly!" he said, "very neat, my friend." And borrowing his friend's glasses he studied the far-off tendrils of smoke in silence awhile.

A quarter of an hour later, a light cruiser altered course from the fleet in the direction of the neutral steamer. Then it was that the amiable merchant was struck by a sudden recollection. It was a matter of considerable urgency and concerned an order for a large number of bolts of calico and a customer's credit. So pressing was the business that he obtained the captain's permission to send a radio telegram to his firm while the approaching cruiser was still some miles away.

The message was duly dispatched, and, with surprising rapidity, by methods with which this narrative is not concerned (of which, indeed, the narrator is entirely ignorant), reached Wilhelmshaven by nightfall. Here four German battle cruisers were

Digitized by Google

raising steam preparatory to carrying out a bombardment at dawn of a populous English watering-place. The message that reached them had, however, nothing to do with calico or credit, but it bade them draw fires and give the usual leave to officers and men; orders for the bombardment were cancelled. The German battle cruisers were not unaccustomed to rapid changes of programme of this sort, and they asked no questions.

At nine o'clock the following morning, a British taxpayer sat down to breakfast in a house commanding a fine view of the sea from the popular watering-place already mentioned. It was a large house, and incidentally offered an admirable target from the sea. The taxpayer unfolded his morning paper, and took a sip of his tea. Then he put the cup down quickly. "You've forgotten the sugar," he said.

"No, dear," replied his wife, "I haven't forgotten it, but there isn't any."

"Eh," said the taxpayer, "why not? why the devil isn't there any sugar?"

The taxpayer's wife advanced a number of popular theories to account for the phenomenon, while the taxpayer gloomily stirred his unsweetened tea.

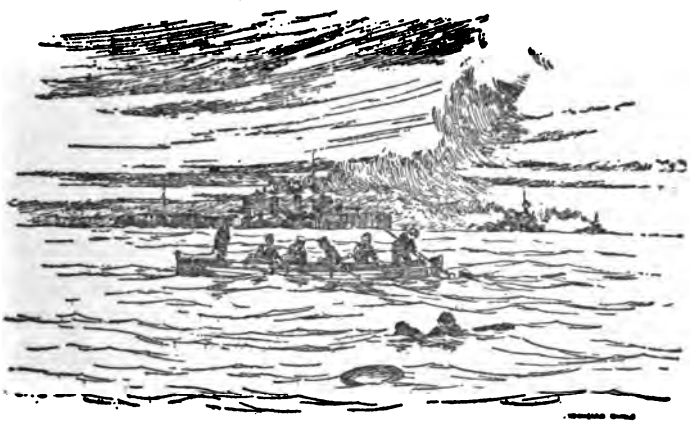
"Then all I should like to know," he replied, when she had finished, "is, what the blazes is our Navy doing?"

"I don't know, dear," said the taxpayer's wife.

Digitized by Google

II. A STRIKING FORCE

Daybreak, drawing back the dark shroud of night from the face of the North Sea, disclosed a British minelaying submarine making her way homeward on the surface. To the two oilskin-clad figures on



A STRIKING FORCE.

the conning tower, chilled and streaming wet in the cheerless dawn, it also betrayed feathers of smoke above the horizon astern. The submarine promptly dived to investigate at closer quarters, and was rewarded by the spectacle of a German cruiser squadron, screened by destroyers, steering a northwesterly course at high speed.

The submarine did not attempt to attack with her torpedoes. She retired instead to where the sand-

Digitized by Google

fog stirs in an endless ground swell, and the North Sea cod hover about the wrecks of neutral merchantmen. In these unlit depths she lay for an hour, listening to the chunk of many propellers pass overhead and die away. She knew nothing of the mysterious chain of events which sent those cruisers venturing beyond the protection of the far-reaching German minefields. She was as ignorant of popular clamour in Germany for spectacular naval activity as she was of the presence of a large convoy of laden freighters a hundred miles away to the northward, escorted by destroyers and making for a British port. These matters were not her "pidgin." On the other hand, having once sighted the German cruisers, she became very much concerned with getting the information through to quarters where it would be appreciated. Accordingly, when the last of the water-borne sounds ceased, the submarine rose to the surface, projected a tiny wireless mast above the wave-tops, and sent out the Call rippling through space.

It was addressed to a certain light cruiser squadron, lying at its buoys with the needles of the pressure gauges flickering and the shells fused in the racks beside each gun, waiting day and night in much the tense preparedness with which the fire brigade waits.

Within two hours the light cruisers were out, ribands of foam and smoke unreeling astern of them, with their attendant destroyers bucketing and plung-

Digitized by Google

ing on either side of them, flinging the spray abroad in the greeting of a steep easterly swell. The last destroyer swung into station ere the line of mine-sweepers, crawling patiently to and fro about the harbour approaches, were blotted from view in their smoke astern. Presently the harbour itself faded out of sight; in lodging, cottage, and villa the women glanced at the clocks as the ships went out, and then turned to their morning tasks and the counting of the slow hours. . . .

East into the sunlight went the slim grey cruisers, and then north, threading their swift way through the half-known menace of the minefields, altering course from time to time to give a wide berth to the horned Death that floated awash among the waves. At intervals the yard-arm of the leading light cruiser would be flecked with colour as a signal bellied out against the wind, and each time speed was increased. Faster and faster they rushed through the yellowish seas, fans and turbines humming their song of speed, and the wind in the shrouds chiming in on a higher note as if from an æolian harp.

The spray rattled like hail against the sloping gun-shields and splinter-mats, behind which men stood huddled in little clusters or leaned peering ahead through glasses; cinders from the smoke of the next ahead collected in little whorls and eddies or crunched underfoot about the decks; the guns' crews jested among themselves in low voices, while the sight-setters adjusted their head-pieces and the

Digitized by Google

layer of each slim gun fussed lovingly about the glittering breech mechanism with a handful of waste. . . .

Then suddenly, above the thunder of the waves and singing of the wind, a clear hail floated aft from a look-out. Bare feet thudded on the planking of the signal bridge, bunting whirled amid the funnel smoke, and the hum of men's voices along the stripped decks deepened into a growl.

"Smoke on the port bow!"

A daylight searchlight chattered suspiciously—paused—flashed a blinding question, and was silent.

Orders droned down the voice-pipes. Somewhere a man laughed—a sudden savage laugh of exultation, that broke a tension none were aware of till that moment. Then a fire-gong jarred: the muzzle of the foremost gun suddenly vomited a spurt of flame, and as the wind whipped the yellow smoke into tatters, the remaining light cruisers opened fire.

Bang! . . . bang! . . . bang! . . . bang! . . . bang!

On the misty horizon there were answering flashes, and a moment later came a succession of sounds as of a child beating a tray. The light cruisers wheeled to the eastward amid scattered columns of foam from falling shells, and as they turned to cut off the enemy from his base the destroyers went past, their bows buried in spray, smoke swallowing the frayed white ensigns fluttering aft. In a minute they had vanished in smoke, out of which guns spat vic-

Digitized by Google

iously, leaving a tangle of little creaming wakes to mark the path of their headlong onslaught.

Neck and neck raced the retreating raiders and the avenging Nemesis from the east coast of Britain. Ahead lay the German minefields and German submarines and the tardy support of the German High Seas Fleet. Somewhere far astern a huddle of nervous merchantmen were being hustled westward by their escort, and midway between the two the hostile destroyer flotillas fought in a desperate death-grapple under the misty blue sky.

When at length the British light cruisers hauled off and ceased fire on the fringe of the German minefields, the enemy were hull down over the horizon, leaving two destroyers sinking amid a swirl of oil and wreckage, and a cruiser on her beam ends ablaze from bow to stern. The sea was dotted with specks of forlorn humanity clinging to spars and rafts. Boats from the British destroyers plied to and fro among them, bent on the quixotic old-fashioned task of succouring a beaten foe. Those not actively engaged in this work of mercy circled round at high speed to fend off submarine attack; the light cruisers stayed by to discourage the advances of a pair of Zeppelins which arrived from the eastward in time to drop bombs on the would-be rescuers of their gasping countrymen.

The bowman of a destroyer's whaler disengaged his boathook from the garments of a water-logged

Digitized by Google

Teuton, grasped his late enemy by the collar and hauled him spluttering into the boat with a single powerful heave of his right arm.

All about them cutters and whalers rising and falling on the swell were quickly being laden to the gunwales with scalded, bleeding, half-drowned prisoners. A midshipman in the stern of a cutter was waving a bedraggled German ensign and half-tearfully entreating his crew to stop gaping at the Zeppelins and attend to orders. The barking of the light cruisers' high-angle guns was punctuated by the whinny of falling bombs and pieces of shrapnel that whipped the surface of the sea into spurts of foam. In the background the sinking cruiser blazed sullenly, the shells in her magazine exploding like gigantic Chinese crackers.

In the bows of the whaler referred to above the able seaman with the boathook sat regarding the captive of his bow and spear (or rather, boathook). "'Ere, Tirpitz!" he said, and removing his cap he produced the stump of a partly smoked cigarette. The captive took it with a watery smile and pawed his rescuer's trousers.

"Kamarad!" he said.

"Not 'arf!" said his captor appreciatively. "Not 'arf you ain't, you —— —— son of a —— ——!"

The second bow, labouring at his oar, looked back over his shoulder.

"'Ush!" he said reprovingly. "'E can't under-

Digitized by Google

stand. Wot's the use o' wastin' that on *'im*?" He spat contemptuously over the gunwale.

. . . . . .

The following thoughtful description of the action appeared in the German wireless *communiqué* next morning:

"Our light forces in an enterprise off the English coast put to flight a vastly superior strength of armed merchant cruisers escorted by destroyers. English fleet on coming to the rescue was compelled to withdraw, and our forces returned to harbour without further molestation."

Every man to his own trade.

III. THE LEFT FLANK

The north-east wind carried the steady grumble of gunfire across the sand-dunes and far out to sea.

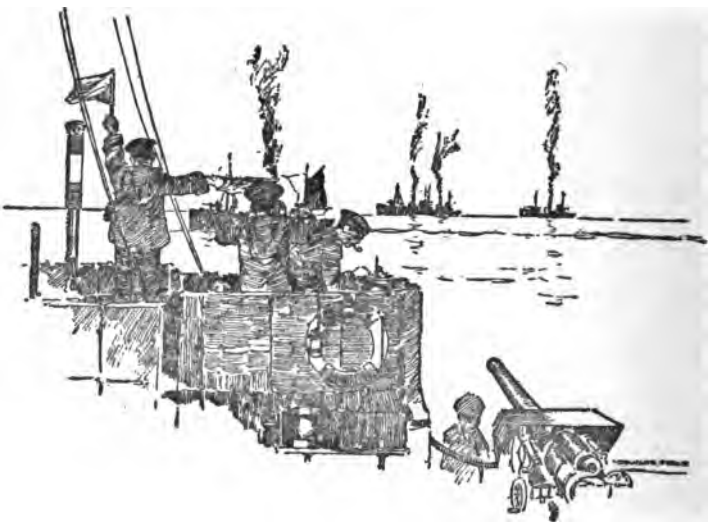
The foremost gun's crew of a British destroyer stood huddled in the lee of the gunshield with their duffle hoods pulled down over their foreheads. The sea was calm, and the stars overhead shone with frosty brilliance. A figure groped its way forward with a bowl of cocoa, and joined the group round the breech of the gun. They drank in turn, grunting as the warmth penetrated into their interiors.

The distant gunfire swelled momentarily. Above the horizon far ahead intermittent gleams marked the activity of searchlight and star-shell.

Digitized by Google

"Them's our guns," said one of the cocoa-drinkers. He wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his coat, and stared ahead. It never seemed to occur to any of them that they might equally well be German guns.

"That's right," confirmed the sight-setter. "There's guns going like that for 'undreds an' 'un-



THE LEFT FLANK.

dreds of miles. Right away up from the sea. Me brother's there—somewhere. . . ." For a moment they ruminated over a mental picture of the sight-setter's brother, a mud-plastered stoical atom, somewhere along those hundreds of miles of wire and bayonets that hedged civilisation and posterity from the Unnamable. "Switzerland to the sea," said the

Digitized by Google

speaker. He jerked the breech-lever absent-mindedly towards him, and closed it again with a little click.

"An' then we takes on," said a loading number. "Us an' these 'ere." He tapped the smooth side of a lyddite shell lying in the rack beside him.

"An' this 'ere," said the man who had brought the cocoa. He thrust forward the cumbersome hilt of a cutlass at his hip. The starlight gleamed dully on the steel guard.

"You won't use that to-night, my son," said the gunlayer. "We ain't goin' to 'ave no *Broke* an' *Swift* song an' dance to-night." He stared out into the clear darkness. "We couldn't never git near enough." Nevertheless, he put out his hand in the gloom and reassured himself of the safety of a formidable bar of iron well within reach. Once in the annals of this war had a British destroyer come to grips at close quarters with the enemy; thereafter her crew walked the earth as men apart, and the darlings of the high gods.

The night grew suddenly darker. It was the mysterious hour that precedes the dawn, when warring men and sleeping animals stir and bethink them of the morrow. The destroyer slackened speed and turned, the wide circle of her wake shimmering against the darkness of the water. As they turned, other dark shapes were visible abeam, moving at measured distance from each other without a light showing or a sound but the faint swish of the water past their sides. The flotilla had reached the limit

Digitized by Google

of its beat, and swung round to resume the unending patrol.

Once from the starry sky came the drone of a seaplane moving up from its base that lay to the southward. Another followed, another and another, skirting the coast and flying well out to sea to avoid the searchlights and anti-aircraft guns of the shore batteries. They passed invisible, and the drone of their engines died away.

"Our spottin' machines," said the sight-setter. "They're going up to spot for the monitors at daylight." He jerked his head astern to the north, and yawned. "I reckon I'd sooner 'ave this job than screenin' monitors wot's bombardin' Ostend. I don't fancy them 15-inch German shell droppin' round out o' nuffink, an' no chance of 'ittin' back."

"They knocks seven-bells outer Ostend, them monitors," said another. "*We* ain't knockin' 'ell out o' nobody, steamin' up an' down like one of them women slops in the 'Orseferry Road." The speaker blinked towards the east where the stars were paling.

"We're all doin' our bit," said the gunlayer, "an' one o' these nights . . ." He shook his head darkly. The dawn crept into the sky: the faces beneath the duffle hoods grew discernible to each other, unshaven, pink-lidded, pinched with cold. Objects, shining with frozen dew, took form out of the black void. The outline of the bridge above them, and the mast behind, stood out against the sky; the head and shoulders of the captain, with his glasses to his

Digitized by Google

eyes, appeared above the bridge screen, where he had been all night, watchful and invisible. The smoke trailing astern blotted out the rest of the flotilla following in each other's wake. Aft along the deck, guns' and torpedo-tubes' crews began to move and stamp their feet for warmth.

Away to starboard a circular object nearly awash loomed up and dropped astern. Another appeared a few minutes later, and was succeeded by a third. Mile after mile these dark shapes slid past, stretching away to the horizon. They were the buoys of the Channel barrage, supporting the mined nets which are but a continuation of four hundred miles of barbed wire.

The day dawned silvery grey and disclosed a diffused activity upon the face of the waters. Two great hospital ships, screened by destroyers as a sinister reminder to the beholder of Germany's forfeited honour, slid away swiftly towards the French coast. A ragged line of coastwise traffic, barges under sail, lighters in tow of tugs, and deep-laden freighters hugging the swept channel along the coast, appeared as if by magic out of "the bowl of night"; from the direction of the chalk-cliffs came a division of drifters in line ahead. They passed close to the destroyers, and the figure on the leading destroyer's bridge bawled through a megaphone. They were curt incoherencies to a landsman—vague references to a number and some compass bearings. A big man on board the drifter flagship waved his arm to in-

Digitized by Google

dicate he understood the message; which was to the effect that one of the barrage buoys appeared to have dragged a little, and the net looked as if it was worth examining.

The drifters spread out along the line of buoys and commenced their daily task of overhauling the steel jackstays, testing the circuits of the mines, repairing damage caused by the ebb and flow of the tide and winter gales.

Half an hour later the destroyers encountered their reliefs, transferred the mantle of responsibility for the left flank with a flutter of bunting and a pair of hand-flags, and returned to their anchorage, where they were greeted by a peremptory order from the signal station to complete with oil fuel and report when ready for sea again. A coastal airship had reported an enemy submarine in the closely guarded waters of the Channel, and along sixty miles of watchful coast the hunt was up.

"My brother Alf," said the sight-setter disgustedly, as he kicked off his seaboots and prepared for an hour's sleep, "'e may be famil'r wif tools wot I don't know nothin' about. But there's one thing about 'em—when 'e lays 'em down, 'e bloody-well lays 'em down."

IV. THE HUNT

The *Blimp* rose from her moorings, soaring seaward, and straightway the roar of her propeller cut

Digitized by Google

off each of the occupants of the car into a separate world of his own silence. The aerodrome with its orderly row of hangars dropped away from under them with incredible swiftness. Fields became patchwork, buildings fell into squares and lozenges without identity. Figures which a minute or two before had been noisy, muscular, perspiring fellow-men working on the ropes, were dots without motion or meaning, and faded to nothingness.

A flock of seagulls rose from the face of the cliff, whirled beneath them like autumn leaves and dropped astern. The parallel lines of white that were breakers chasing each other to ruin on a rock-bound coast merged into the level floor of the Atlantic, and presently there was nothing but sea and blue sky with the rushing wind between, and this glittering triumph of man's handiwork held suspended like a bauble midway.

The pilot turned in his seat and grinned over his shoulder at the observer. The grin was the only visible portion of his face: the rest was hidden by flying-helmet and goggles and worsted muffler. The grin said: "It's a fine morning and the old bus is running like a witch. What's the odds on sighting a Fritz?"

The observer laughed and shouted an inaudible reply against the roar of the wind. He pulled a slip of chewing gum out of his pocket, bit off a piece, and passed the rest to the pilot. Then he adjusted

Digitized by Google

the focus of the high-power glasses and began methodically quartering out the immense circular expanse of sea beneath them.

Half an hour had passed when the wireless operator in the rear leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder. His listeners were to his ears, and he was scribbling something on a slate. "S.O.S.—

THE HUNT.

S.O.S."—a bearing from a distant headland—"fourteen miles—S.O.S.—S.O.S.—come quickly—I am being shelled—S.O.S.—Subma——" The operator paused with his pencil above the slate, waited a moment, and handed the slate forward.

The message, soundless, appealing, that had reached them out of the blue immensity had ceased abruptly. The pilot glanced from the compass to a small square of chart clamped before him, and slow-

Digitized by Google

ly turned the wheel. Then he looked back over his shoulder and grinned again.

A quarter of an hour later the pilot extended a gauntletted hand and pointed to the rim of the horizon. A faint smudge of smoke darkened into a trailing cloud, and presently they saw ahead of it the forepart of a ship, driving through the water at a speed which clove a white, irregular furrow across the surface of the sea. She was swerving from side to side like a hunted buck, and as the dirigible dipped her nose and the hum of the wind redoubled to a roar in the ears of the crew, they saw away to the west a tiny cigar-shaped object. At intervals a spurt of flame shot from it, and a little pale mushroom-shaped cloud appeared above the steamer as the shrapnel burst.

The *Blimp* swooped at eighty miles an hour upon that cigar-shaped object. The observer braced his feet and grasped the bomb release lever, his jaws still moving about the piece of chewing-gum. The sea, flecked with little waves, rushed up to greet them. They had a glimpse of the submarine's crew tumbling pell-mell for the conning-tower hatchway, of the wicked gun abandoned forward still trained on the fleeing merchantman. The next instant the quarry had shot beneath them. A sharp concussion of the air beat upon the fragile car and body of the airship as her nose was flung up and round. The dirigible's bomb had burst right forward on the

Digitized by Google

pointed bows, and the submarine was diving in a confused circle of broken water and spray.

The *Blimp* turned to drop another bomb ahead of the rapidly vanishing wake, and then marked the spot with a calcium flare, while the wireless operator jiggled a far-flung "Tally ho!" on the sounding-key of his apparatus.

The tramp disappeared below the horizon, and they caught disjointed scraps of her breathless tale while they circled in wide spirals above the watery arena.

Three motor launches were the first upon the scene, each with a slim gun in the bows, and carrying, like hornets, a sting in their tails. They were old hands at the game, and they spread out on the hunt with business-like deliberation under the directions of the *Blimp's* Morse lamp. The captain of the inshore boat (he had been a stock-broker in an existence several æons gone by) traced a tar-stained finger across the chart, and glanced again at the compass. "Nets—nets—nets," he mumbled. "The swine probably knows about those to the northwest. . . . He daren't go blind much longer. Ha!"

"Feather three points on your port bow," winked the *Blimp*. Over went the motor launch's helm, and the seaward boat suddenly darted ahead in a white cloud of spray. Bang! a puff of smoke drifted away from the wet muzzle of her gun; half a mile ahead a ricochet flung up a column of foam as the shell went sobbing and whimpering into the blue distance.

Digitized by Google

"Periscope dipped" waved a pair of hand-flags from the boat that had fired. And a moment later, "Keep out of my wake! Am going to release a charge."

For an hour that relentless blindfold hunt went forward, punctuated by exploding bombs and depth charges, and the crack of the launches' guns as the periscope of the submarine rose for an instant's glimpse of his assailants and vanished again. Twice the enemy essayed a torpedo counter-attack, and each time the trail passed wide. Then, crippled and desperate, he doubled on his tracks, and for a while succeeded in shaking off the pursuit. Nets, as he knew, lay ahead, and nets were death; safety lay to the southward could he but keep submerged; but the water, spurting through the buckled plating and rivets started by the bursting depth charges, had mingled with the acid in the batteries and generated poison gas, which drove him to the surface. Here he turned, a couple of miles astern of his pursuers, and manned both guns, a hunted vermin at bay. As his foremost gun opened fire, a heavy shell burst a few yards abeam of the submarine, and the captain of the nearest motor launch raised his glasses. It was not a shell fired from a motor launch.

"The destroyers," he said. "Now why couldn't they have kept away till we'd made a job of it?" On the horizon the masts and funnels of a flotilla of destroyers appeared in line abreast, approaching at full speed, firing as they came. The next instant a

Digitized by Google

shell from the submarine burst on the tiny forecastle of the launch, shattering the gun, gun's crew, and wheelhouse. The coxswain dropped over the wrecked wheel and slowly slid to the deck like a marionette suddenly deprived of animation. The lieutenant R.N.V.R. who had once been a stock-broker stood upright for an instant with his hands to his throat as if trying to stem the red torrent spurting through his fingers, and then pitched brokenly beside the coxswain.

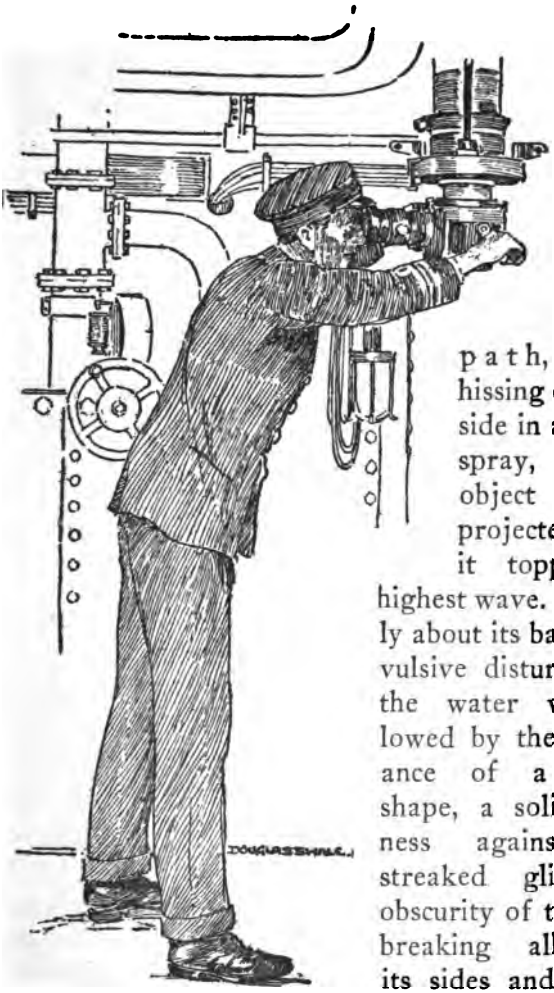
The captain of the submarine counted the approaching destroyers, opened the seacock to speed the flooding of his doomed craft, gave a swift glance overhead at the *Blimp* swooping towards them for the *coup-de-grâce,* and ordered Cease Fire. Then he waved his hands in token of surrender.

V. OVERDUE

The thin light of a sickle moon tipped the crest of each swift-running sea with silver. The rest was a purple blackness, through which the north wind slashed like a knife, and the sound of surf on a distant shoal was carried moaning. At intervals a bank of racing clouds trailed across the face of the moon, and then all was inky dark for a while.

It was during one of these periods of obliteration of all things visible that a slender, perpendicular object rose above the surface of the sea. Gradually the dim light waxed again: a wave, cloven in its

Digitized by Google



OVERDUE.

path, passed hissing on either side in a trail of spray, and the object slowly projected until it topped the highest wave. Presently about its base a convulsive disturbance in the water was followed by the appearance of a conical shape, a solid blackness against the streaked glimmering obscurity of the water breaking all about its sides and streaming in cascades from

Digitized by Google

the flat railed-in top. A hatchway opened, and two figures crawled out, clinging to the rail of their swaying foothold while the full force of the wind clawed and battered at their forms. They maintained a terse conversation by dint of shouting in turn with their lips to each other's ears, while the conning-tower of the submarine on which they stood moved forward in the teeth of the elements.

For half an hour they went plunging and lurching onwards, clinging with numbed hands to the rail as a green sea swept about their legs, wiping the half-frozen spray from their eyes to search the darkness ahead with night-glasses. Then one pointed away on the bow.

"How's that?" he bawled. A point on the bow something dark tumbled amid the waves and flying spindrift. The other stared a moment, shouted an order to the invisible helmsman through a voice-pipe, and the wind that had hitherto been in their streaming eyes smote and buffeted them on the left cheek. A scurry of sleet whirled momentarily about them, blotting out the half-glimpsed buoy; the taller of the two figures put out an arm and smote his companion on the back. They had made that buoy at dawn the previous day, and then, according to the custom of British submarines in enemy waters, submerged till nightfall. Now, despite the set of the tides and currents and the darkness, they had found it again, and with it their bearings for the desperate journey that lay ahead.

Digitized by Google

For two hours they groped their way onwards through what would have been unfathomable mysteries to a landsman. Compass, chart, and leadline played their part: but not even these, coupled with the stoutest heart that ever beat, avail against unknown minefield and watchful patrols. Thrice the two alert, oilskin-clothed figures dived through the hatchway into the interior of the submarine, and the platform on which they had been standing vanished eerily beneath the surface as a string of long, dark shapes went by with a throb of unseen propellers. Once when thus submerged an unknown object grated past the thin shell with a harsh metallic jar, and passed astern in silence. Then it was that the captain of the submarine removed his cap, passing his sleeve quickly across his damp forehead, and the gesture was doubtless accepted where all prayers of gratitude find their way.

The first gleam of dawn, however, found no submarine on the surface. It showed a business-like flotilla of destroyers on their beat, and a long line of net drifters at anchor in the far distance amid sandbanks. An armed trawler with rust-streaked sides and a gun forward was making her way through the cold, grey seas in the direction of the drifters; a hoist of gay-coloured signal flags flew from her stump of a mast, and at the peak a tattered German ensign. The crew were clustered for warmth in the lee of the engine-room casing, their collars turned up above their ears, and their hands deep in their

Digitized by Google

pockets. They were staring ahead intently at the line of nets guarding the entrance to the harbour they were about to enter. None noticed a black speck that peeped intermittently out of their tumbling wake thirty yards astern, and followed them up the channel. Three or four fathoms beneath that questioning speck, in an electric-lit glittering steel cylinder, a young man stood peering into the lense of a high-power periscope, his right hand resting on a lever. He spoke in a dull monotone, with long intervals of silence; and throughout the length of that cylinder, beside valve and dial and lever, a score of pairs of eyes watched him steadfastly.

She's given her funnel a coat of paint since last month . . . port ten—steady! steady! . . . There's the gate vessel moving. . . . The skipper is waving to hurry him up. . . . Wants his breakfast, I suppose. . . . That must be the big crane in the dockyard. . . . There are flags hung about everywhere. . . . Starboard a touch. . . . It's getting devilish light. . . . There's something that looks like a battle-cruiser alongside. . . ."

There was a long silence, then the figure manipulating the periscope suddenly stood upright.

"We're through," he said quietly. "And that's their new battle-cruiser."

. . . . . .

In the smoking-room of a British submarine depot a group of officers sat round the fire. Now and again one or other made a trivial observation

Digitized by Google

from behind his newspaper; occasionally one would glance swiftly at the clock and back to his paper as if half afraid the glance would be intercepted. The hands of the clock crept slowly round to noon; the clock gave a little preliminary whirr and then struck the hour.

"Eight bells," said the youngest of the group in a tone of detachment, as if the hour had no special significance. A grave-faced lieutenant-commander seated nearest the door rose slowly to his feet and buttoned up his monkey jacket.

"You goin', Bill?" asked his neighbour in a low voice.

The upright figure nodded. "He'd have done as much for me," he replied, and walked quickly out of the room.

No one spoke for some minutes. Then the youngest member lowered the magazine he was holding in front of him.

"Do they cry?" he asked.

"No," said two voices simultaneously. "Least," added one, "not at the time."

The silence settled down again like dust that had been disturbed; then the first speaker leaned forward and tapped the ashes out of his pipe.

"Well," he observed, "they didn't get him cheap, at all events. I'm open to a bet that he sent a Boche or two ahead of him to pipe the side."

The group nodded a grim assent.

"Yes," said one who had not hitherto spoken. "I

Digitized by Google

reckon you're right. But we shan't hear till the war's over. They know how to keep their own secrets." He puffed at his pipe reflectively.

"Anyhow, thank God I'm a bachelor," he concluded. He lifted a fox-terrier's head between his hands and shook it gently to and fro. "No one need go and tell our wives if *we* don't come back—eh, little Blinks?" The dog yawned, gave the hands that held him a perfunctory lick, and resumed his interrupted nap sprawling across his master's knees.

. . . . . .

Among the letters intercepted shortly afterwards on their way to a South American State from Germany was one that contained the following significant passage:

". . . Yesterday all Kiel was beflagged: we were to have had a half-holiday on the occasion of the trials of the great new battle cruiser ——. Owing to an unforeseen incident, however, the trials were not completed. Our half-holiday has been postponed indefinitely. . . ."

VI. "TUPPENCE APIECE"

The herring were in the bay, and the fleet of sailing smacks went trailing out on the light wind with their eager crews of old men and boys straining at the halliards to catch the last capful of wind. After them came the armed guard-boat of the little peace-

Digitized by Google

ful fleet, a stout trawler with a gun in her bows, fussing in the wake of her charges.

The skipper of the guard-boat was at the wheel, a tall, gaunt old man with a fringe of grey whisker round his jaws and a mouth as tight as a scar. He it was who located the herring and placed the fleet

"TUPPENCE APIECE."

across their path, and all that day the smacks lay to their nets till the porpoises turned inshore and drove the silvery host eastward. After them went the smacks, with holds half-full, lured on by the promise of two quarters' rent as good as paid. Finally, the old Trawler Reserveman checked the pursuit.

"Fish or no fish," he cried. "Here ye bide the

Digitized by Google

night." They had reached the limit of the safety zone in those waters, and he rounded up his flock like a sagacious sheep-dog, counting the little craft carefully ere he took up his position to seaward of them for the night. At the first hint of dawn he weighed anchor and counted again: his grim old face darkened. He turned to seaward where the sky was lightening fast, and searched the mist through glasses. Three smacks were discernible some miles outside their allotted area. The burly mate stood beside his father, and watched the delinquents hauling in their nets with a speed that hinted at an uneasy conscience.

"They'm drifted in a bit of a tide rip, mebbe?" he ventured.

The old man growled an oath. "Tide rip? Nay! They'm just daft wi' greed. There's no wit nor dacency in their sodden heads. An' I'll larn 'em both. By God I'll larn 'em to disobey my orders." . . . He watched the far-off craft hoisting sail, with eyes grey and cold as flints beneath the bushy brows. "Aye," he said threateningly, "I'll larn ye . . ." and clumped forward to the wheel-house.

The sun had not yet risen, and the thin morning mists wreathed the face of the waters. As the trawler gathered way a sudden flash of light blinked out of the mist to the northward. The report of a gun was followed by the explosion of a shell fifty yards on the near side of the most distant fishing-smack.

Digitized by Google

The trawler skipper measured the distance from the flash to the fishing fleet, and thence to the truants bowling towards them on the morning breeze.

"Man the gun!" he roared. "Action Stations, lads!" He picked up a megaphone and bellowed through it in the direction of his charges: "Cut your warps an' get ter hell outer this!" Then he wrenched the telegraph to full speed and put the wheel over, heading his little craft towards the quarter from which the flash had come. The gun's crew closed up round the loaded gun, rolling up their sleeves and spitting on their hands as is the custom of their breed before a fight.

"There's a submarine yonder in the mist," shouted the skipper. "Open fire directly ye sight her and keep her busy while the smacks get away." Astern of them the small craft were cutting their nets away and hoisting sail. Three or four were already making for safety to the westward before the early morning breeze that hurried in catspaws over the sea.

Bang!

The trawler opened fire as the submarine appeared ahead like a long, hump-backed shadow against the pearly grey of the horizon. The breech clanged open and the acrid smoke floated aft as they reloaded.

"Rapid fire!" shouted the skipper. Shells were bursting all about the fleeing smacks. "Give 'em hell, lads. Her've got two guns an' us but the one. . . ." He glanced back over his shoulder at the lit-

Digitized by Google

tle craft he was trying to save, and then bent to the voice-pipe. "Every ounce o' steam, Luther. Her'll try to haul off an' out-range my little small gun."

Smoke poured from the gaily-painted funnel; the "little small gun" barked and barked again, and one after the other the empty cylinders went clattering into the scuppers. A shell struck the trawler somewhere in the region of the mizzen mast, and sent the splinters flying. A minute later another exploded off the port bow, flinging the water in sheets over the gun's crew. The sight-setter slid into a sitting position, his back against the pedestal of the gun-mounting, and his head lolling on his shoulder. They had drawn the enemy's fire at last, and every minute gave the smacks a better chance. Shell after shell struck the little craft as she blundered gallantly on. The stern was alight: the splintered foremast lay across a funnel riddled like a pepper-pot. The trawler's boy—a shock-headed child of fourteen who had been passing up ammunition to the gun—leaned whimpering against the engine-room casing, nursing a blood-sodden jacket wrapped about his forearm.

The mate was at the gun, round which three of the crew lay. One had raised himself on his elbow and was coughing out his soul. The other two were on their backs staring at the sky.

In the face of the trawler's fire, the submarine turned and drew out of range, firing as she went. One of the British shells had struck the low-lying hull astern, and a thin cloud of grey smoke ascended

Digitized by Google

from the rent. Figures were visible running aft along the railed-in deck, gesticulating.

"Ye've hit her," shouted the skipper from the wheel. "Give 'em hell, lads——"

A sudden burst of flame and smoke enveloped the wheel-house, and the skipper went hurtling through the doorway and pitched with a thud on the deck.

The mate ran aft and knelt beside him. "Father," he cried hoarsely.

The inert blue-clad figure raised himself on his hands, and his head swayed between his massive shoulders.

"Father," said the mate again, and shook him, as if trying to awaken someone from sleep. "Be ye hurted terrible bad?"

The grim old seadog raised his head, and his son saw that he was blind.

"Pitch the codes overboard," he said. "I'm blind an' stone deaf, an' my guts are all abroad under me, but ye'll fight the little gun while there's a shell left aboard. . . ."

The mate stood up and looked aft along the splintered, bloody deck, beyond the smoke and steam trailing to leeward.

"The gun's wrecked," he said slowly, as if speaking to himself. "The little smacks are clear o' danger. . . . The destroyers are comin' up. . . . Ye have fought a good fight, father." The submarine had ceased fire, and as he spoke, she submerged and

Digitized by Google

vanished sullenly, like a wild beast baulked of its prey.

. . . . . .

An old woman sat knitting beside the fire in the heart of a Midland town next day. The door opened and a girl came in quickly, with a shawl over her head and a basket on her arm.

"There's a surprise for supper," she said.

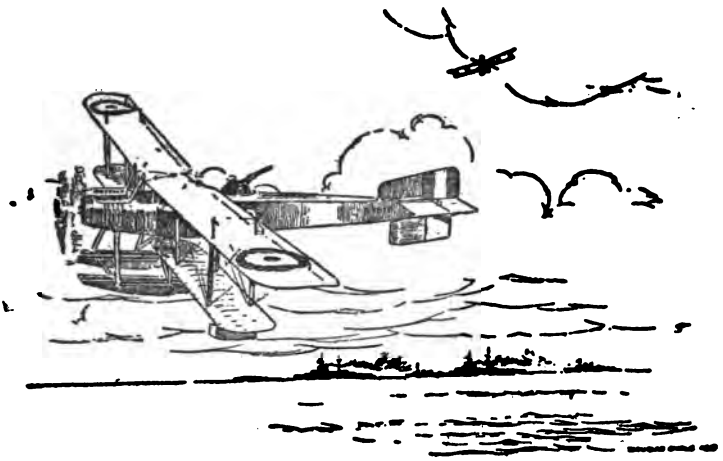
The old woman looked inside the basket. "Herrin'!" she said. "What did they cost?"

"Tuppence apiece," replied the girl lightly, as she hung up her shawl.

"They was cheap," said the old woman as she fell to larding the frying-pan.

But all things considered, perhaps they were not so very cheap after all.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER III

THE NAVY-THAT-FLIES *

THE Royal Naval Air Service found itself "over the other side" about the time that the shells of the British monitors began feeling for the hidden batteries of the Boche behind the Belgian coast.

"I can't see where they're pitching," said the Navy-that-Floats, referring to the shells of the monitors bursting twelve miles away. "What about spotting for us, old son?"

"That will I do," replied the Navy-that-Flies.

* The chapter bearing this title was written before the passing of the Air Force Act. It is included in this book "without prejudice," as the lawyers say.

Digitized by Google

"And more also. But I shall have to wear khaki, because it's done, out here; by everybody apparently. Even the newspaper reporters wear khaki. Also I must have the right machines and lots of 'em."

"Wear anything you like," replied the Navy-that-Floats, "as long as you can help us to hit these shore batteries. Only—because you wear khaki and see life, don't forget you're still the same old Navy as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."

The Navy-that-Flies added "Amen," and said that it wouldn't forget. It garbed itself in khaki, but retained the ring and curl on the sleeve, and the naval cap (with the eagle's wings in place of the crown and anchor in the badge), plus a khaki cap-cover. Wherever its squadrons were based they rigged a flagstaff and flew the White Ensign at the peak. They erected wooden huts and painted them service grey, labelling them "Mess-deck," "Wardroom," "Gun-room," etc., as the case might be.

They divided the flights into port and starboard watches, and solemnly asked leave to "go ashore" for recreation. Those who strayed from the same stern paths of discipline suffered the same punishments as the Navy-that-Floats. And at the conclusion of each day's work the wardroom dined, and drank to their King, sitting, according to the custom and tradition of the naval service.

They filled in shell-holes and levelled the ground for aerodromes, they ran up hangars and excavated dug-outs—whither they retired in a strong, silent

Digitized by Google

rush (the expression is theirs), when the apprehensive Boche attempted to curtail their activity with bombs.

And by degrees the right machines came along. The Navy-that-Flies swung itself into them critically, flung them about in the air three miles high, testing and measuring their capabilities. Then they fought them, crashed them, improved on them till they were righter still, and finally proceeded (to quote another of their expressions) to "put the wind up Old Man Boche" in a way that helped the Navy-that-Floats enormously.

But apart from spotting duties, which were necessarily intermittent, the R.N.A.S. undertook a photographic reconnaissance of the entire Belgian coast from Nieuport to the Dutch frontier. The work in progress at Ostend and Zeebrugge, the activities of submarines and destroyers inside the basins; locks, quays, and gun-emplacements, and the results of bombs dropped thereon the night before, were all faithfully recorded by these aerial cameras. The negatives were developed and printed, the resultant bird-pictures enlarged, studied through stereoscopic lenses, and finally given to the monitors "for information and guidance." Since it is not given to everyone to recognise the entrance to a dug-out or a group of searchlights as they appear from a height of 20,000 feet, the photographs were embellished with explanatory notes for the benefit of anyone unaccustomed to such unfamiliar aspects of creation.

Digitized by Google

The Germans claim to be a modest people. They were as busy as beavers, and they resented these importunate photographers with all the fervour that springs from true modesty. Their anti-aircraft guns plastered the intruders with bursting shrapnel, and from every coast aerodrome Boche machines rose like a cloud of angry hornets to give battle. Yet day after day fresh plates find their way to the developing trays, and a comparison between the official reports of the flight—couched in a laconic terseness of phrase that is good to read—and the amazing results obtained gives perhaps the truest measure of the work performed by these very gallant gentlemen.

Not a spadeful of earth can be turned over, nor a trowel of cement added to a bastion along the coast, but a note appears a day or two later upon the long chart which adorns the record office of this particular squadron. A crumpled escorting machine may have come down out of the clouds, eddying like a withered leaf, to crash somewhere behind the German line; there may be somewhere near the shore a broken boy in goggles and leather lying amid the wreckage of his last flight. Such is the price paid for a few more dots added in red ink to a couple of feet of chart. But as long as the photographic machine returns with the camera intact, the price is paid ungrudgingly.

The work of these photographic recorders, pilot and observer alike, differs from all other forms of war flying. Their sole duty is to take photographs,

Digitized by Google

not haphazard, but of a given objective. This necessitates steering a perfectly steady course regardless of all distractions such as bursting "Archies" and angry "Albatross" fighters. They leave the fighting to their escorts, and their fate to Providence. The observer, peering earthwards through his view-finder, steers the pilot by means of reins until he sights the line on which the desired series of photographs are to be taken: once over this, the pilot flies the machine on an undeviating course, and the observer proceeds to take photographs. When all the plates have been exposed, they turn round and return home with what remain of the escort. On occasions the escort have vanished, either earthwards or in savage pursuit of resentful though faint-hearted Boches; this is when the homing photographers' moments are apt to become crowded with incident.

One such adventure deserves to be recorded. It happened about 12,000 above mother-earth: the official reports, typed in triplicate, covered some dozen lines; the actual events, an equal number of minutes; but the story is one that should live through eternity.

"While exposing six plates" (says the official report of this youthful Recording Angel) "observed five H.A.'s cruising." ("H.A." stands for Hostile Aeroplane.) "Not having seen escort since turning inland, pilot prepared to return. Enemy separated, one taking up position above tail and one ahead. The other three glided towards us on port side" (observe the Navy speaking), "firing as they came.

Digitized by Google

"The two diving machines fired over one hundred rounds, hitting pilot in shoulder." As a matter of sober fact, the bullet entered his shoulder from above and behind, breaking his left collar bone, and emerged just above his heart, tearing a jagged rent down his breast. Both his feet, furthermore, pierced by bullets, but the observer was not concerned with petty detail.

"Observer held fire until H.A. diving on tail was within five yards."

Here it might be mentioned that the machines were hurtling through space at a speed in the region of one hundred miles an hour. The pilot of the "H.A.," having swooped to within speaking distance, pushed up his goggles and laughed triumphantly as he took his sight for the shot that was to end the fight. But the observer had his own idea of how the fight should end.

"Then shot one tray into pilot's face," he says, with curt relish, and watched him stall, sideslip, and go spinning earthward in a trail of smoke.

He turned his attention to his own pilot. The British machine was barely under control, but as the observer rose in his seat to investigate, the foremost gun fired, and the aggressor ahead went out of control and dived nose-first in helpless spirals. Suspecting that his mate was badly wounded in spite of this achievement, the observer swung one leg over the side of the fusilage and climbed on to the wing —figure for a minute the air pressure on his body

Digitized by Google

during this gymnastic feat—until he was beside the pilot. Faint and drenched with blood, the latter had nevertheless got his machine back into complete control.

"Get back, you ass," he said, through white lips, in response to inquiries as to how he felt. The ass got back the way he came, and looked round for the remainder of the "H.A.'s." These, however, appeared to have lost stomach for further fighting, and fled. The riddled machine returned home at one hundred knots, while the observer, having nothing better to do, continued to take photographs. "The pilot, though wounded, made a perfect landing." Thus the report concludes.

The Navy-that-Flies had been in France some time before the Army heard very much about its doings. This was not so much the fault of the Army as the outcome of the taciturn silence in which the Navy-that-Flies set to work. It had been bidden to observe the traditions of the silent Navy, and it observed them, forbearing even to publish the number of Boche machines it accounted for day by day.

But there came a time when its light could no longer be hid under a bushel. "Hullo," said the generals and others concerned with the affairs of the entrenched Army, speaking among themselves, "what about it?" They consulted the Army-that-Flies.

Now the Army-that-Flies had been confronted in the early days of the war with perhaps the toughest proposition that was ever faced by mortals of even

Digitized by Google

their imperturbable courage. In numerical inferiority to the enemy it had been called upon to maintain a ceaseless photographic reconnaissance far behind the enemy's trenches; to spot for the guns of the Army along a suddenly extended front: to "keep the wind up" the Boche so that for every ten of our machines that crossed the German lines, barely one of his would dare to cross ours. This is called aerial supremacy, and they established and maintained it with fewer and worse machines than they care to talk about to-day.

"Of course we know all about these naval Johnnies," said the Army-that-Flies. "They'd steal grey paint from their dying grandmothers, and they fear nothing in the heavens above, nor the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth. They are complaining that things are getting a bit dull along the coast. . . . We might show them a thing or two if they cared to join up with us for a while."

"Let's ask them," said the Army.

So the Navy-that-Flies was invited "to co-operate with the Royal Flying Corps on such portions of the line where its experience of escort work and offensive patrols would prove of the greatest value." Or words to that effect.

The Navy-that-Flies accepted the invitation with suppressed exultation, and detailed certain squadrons of fighters. It admits having selected picked pilots, because there was the credit of the old Navy to consider. Each squadron was entrusted to the care of

Digitized by Google

a seasoned veteran of fully twenty-five summers, and of the flight leaders there was one that had even turned twenty-one. In short the Navy-that-Flies was sending of its best; and its worst was very good indeed.

They flew away from the coast and the sea, and their motor transport rumbled through the empty plains of France, till they closed upon the fringe of the entrenched army. Here perched above the surrounding country on some plateau or hill-side, with the ceaseless murmur of the guns in their ears, each of the squadrons rigged its flagstaff and hoisted the White Ensign, set up the grey-painted huts and the ship's bell that divided the day into ship-watches, slung their hammocks, and announced that they were ready to "co-operate" with anybody or anything.

The Army-that-Flies laughed at the ship's bell and the rest of the naval shibboleth, but it took the visitors to its heart. With hands deep in the pockets of its "slacks" and pipe in mouth it came over and examined the fighting machines of the Navy-that-Flies and the "doo-hickies" thereof, and it said things under its breath.

The Navy-that-Flies did not waste much time looking about it. One fire-eater setting off to explore the country some thirty miles behind the German lines came upon a school of "Quirks." Quirks, it may be explained for the benefit of bipeds, are young Boche aviators in an embryonic stage. From the convenient ambush of a cloud he watched their antics for

Digitized by Google

a while, as they flopped about above their aerodrome; and then, descending like a thunderbolt, he tumbled three over, scattered the remainder and returned to make his report. The squadron listened gravely to the story and concluded that the Golden Age had dawned.

But sterner work lay ahead, and a fair sample of it is contained in the report of another young gentleman who went scouting singlehanded over the German lines what time the "gentlemen of England" were, if not abed, cracking the first of their breakfast eggs.

He was attacked by two single-seated "Albatross" machines and a Halberstadt fighter. Into the engine of the latter he emptied a tray of cartridges, with the result that it immediately went spinning down; to make assurance doubly sure he fired another fifty rounds into the whirling wreck as it fell.

By this time a veritable hornet's nest appears to have risen about his ears; three more "Albatross" machines whirred to the attack, and in his subsequent report he notes with artistic enjoyment that the head of one pilot precisely filled the ring of his sight. This eye for detail enabled him to recall the fact that he actually saw three bullets strike the pilot's head, with the not surprising result that the would-be-avenger heeled over and sped to the ground.

By this time he had been driven down to a height of 200 feet above German-occupied territory, and,

Digitized by Google

having lost sight of the remainder of his aggressors, he decided to return home at that height.

As was to be expected, his adventures were by no means terminated by this decision. An astonished company of German cavalry drew rein and peppered him with rifle-shots as he whisked over the tops of their lances. Five minutes later another "Albatross" attacked him.

He rocked the machine in giddy sweeps until within fifty yards of his opponent, and side-looped over him (this, remember, at 200 feet from the ground), fired a short burst and drove the Hun off for a moment while he regained equilibrium. Then once more the enemy swooped upon him.

From this point onwards the reader may be warned against vertigo. The pilot's own version, the bald official report of the affair, requires no embellishment or comment, though the latter is not easy to suppress.

"These operations," he states, "were repeated several times with a slight variation in the way I looped over him (flying against a head wind). When he was about 150 yards behind me, I looped straight over him, and coming out of the loop dived at him and fired a good long burst. I saw nearly all the bullets go into the pilot's back, just on the edge of the cockpit. He immediately dived straight into the ground.

"I then went over the German trenches filled with soldiers, and was fired on by machine guns, rifles,

Digitized by Google

and small field guns, in or out" (Ye Gods and Little Fishes!) "of range. There were many shells bursting in and about the German trenches."

The report concluded with estimates of the strength of various bodies of infantry and cavalry, movements of convoy and artillery noticed during the intervals between aerial somersaults. The pilot landed at the first aerodrome he saw—adding, in explanation of such an irregular proceeding, that his machine was badly shot about.

The squadrons co-operating with the R.F.C. commenced by faithfully recording all aerial combats in which their machines were engaged. But after a while such events became too commonplace to chronicle. They fought from dawn to dusk, generally a day's journey for a horse behind the German lines. They fought at altitudes at which in spring a thermometer registed 50° of frost, returning with petrol tanks frozen, and hands and feet and ears swollen by frost-nip. One squadron had a hundred decisive fights in a month (omitting skirmishes), and accounted for twenty-five Boche machines. Its log (unofficially termed "Game-book") contained such entries as the following: "Four machines went up: managed to bag five Huns before breakfast."

For the first time in their lives the pilots got all the fighting they wanted, and revelled in it gluttonously. They grew fine-drawn, with the accentuated brilliancy of eye common to men in perfect condition living at the highest tension. They met Winged

Digitized by Google

Death hourly in the blue loneliness above the clouds; the rustle of his sable wings became a sound familiar as the drone of their own engines, so that all terror of the Destroyer passed out of their souls—if indeed it had ever entered there.

And Death in his turn grew merciful, amazed. At least this is the only explanation to offer for certain tales that are told along the Front, where the White Ensign flies.

But hear for yourselves and judge.

A Naval pilot—a Canadian, by the way—attacked a single-seater "Albatross" scout at 8,000 feet above the German lines. He disposed of him after a short engagement, and was then attacked by seven others who drove him down to 3,000 feet and shot his machine to pieces. He plunged to the ground and crashed amid the wreck of his machine a couple of hundred yards behind the Canadian lines, breaking a leg and dislocating a shoulder. A furious bombardment from German heavy artillery was in progress at the time, and he crawled into a shell-hole, where he remained from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Fire then having slackened, a party from the trenches went in search of his body with a view to burying it, and found him conscious and cheerful, though very thirsty.

The Navy-that-Flies is witness that I lie not.

As far as bombing operations are concerned, the Navy-that-Flies confines its attentions principally to the German bases along the Belgian coast, and any

Digitized by Google

lurking submarines or vagrant destroyers observed in the vicinity. Bombing is carried out by both aeroplanes and seaplanes, and differs from other forms of war flying in that it is principally performed at night.

The function of the bombing machine is to reach its given objective in as short a time as possible, without provoking more "scraps" on the way than are inevitable, to "deliver the goods," and, if not brought down by anti-aircraft fire, to return with all speed. They are not primarily fighters, and when laden with bombs are not theoretically a match for a hostile fighting machine with unfettered manœuvring powers.

Engine-trouble or loss of stability over enemy territory means almost infallible capture or death for the pilot of a bombing aeroplane. Yet in cases of disablement, rather than come down on the ground and suffer themselves or their machine to be taken prisoner, it is their gallant tradition to try to struggle out to sea. Here they stand about as much chance of life as a pheasant winged above a lake, but the machine sinks before German hands can touch it.

Now it happened that on one such occasion the descent into the sea of a bombing machine was observed by two French flying boats which were out on patrol. The distressed machine was still within range of the shore batteries, and the Boches, smarting under the effect of the bombs she had succeeded

Digitized by Google

in dropping, were retaliating in the most approved Germanic manner by plastering the helpless machine with shrapnel as she slowly sank.

The two French flying boats sped to the rescue and alighted in the water beside the wrecked British machine. One embarked the observer, who was wounded, and, in spite of redoubled fire from the shore, succeeded in returning safely. The other French flying-boat actually embarked the remaining occupants of the bombing machine, but was hit as it rose from the water and fell disabled. The French pilot, seeing a Boche seaplane approaching, and a bevy of small craft in-shore coming out against them, scribbled a message to say that his venture had failed; he found time to add, however, with true Gallic dauntlessness of spirit, "Vive la France!" This missive he fastened to the leg of his carrier pigeon, and succeeded in releasing it before rescuers and rescued were taken prisoners.

From time to time curt official announcements of successful bomb-raids upon German destroyer and submarine bases appear in the press. It may be that the Naval honours or casualties lists are swelled thereby. But no one who has not stood in the wind that blows across the bombers' aerodrome at night, in those last tense moments before the start, can form any idea of the conditions under which these grim laurels are earned.

One by one the leather-clad pilots conclude their final survey and climb up into their machines. They

Digitized by Google

adjust goggles and gloves: there is a warning "Stand clear!" and the darkness fills with roaring sound as No. 1 starts his engine. For a moment longer he sits in the utter isolation of darkness and the deafening noise of his own engine. No further sounds can reach him; not another order nor the valedictory "Good luck!" from those whose lot it is to only stand and wait. He settles himself comfortably and fingers the familiar levers and throttle; then with a jerk the bomber starts along the uneven ground, gathers way, and rising, speeds droning into the darkness like a gigantic cockchafer. A moment later No. 2 follows, then another, and another. The night swallows them, and the sound of their engines dies away.

A couple of hours later in one of the grey-painted huts that fringe the aerodrome a telephone bell jangles. The squadron commander picks up the receiver and holds converse with a tiny metallic voice that sounds very far away; the conversation ends, he puts on his cap and goes out into the darkness; a few minutes later a sudden row of lights across the aerodrome makes bright pin-pricks in the darkness. From far away in the air comes the hum of an engine growing momentarily louder. It grows louder and clearer as the homing machine circles overhead and finally comes to earth with a rushing wind and the scramble of men's feet invisible.

The pilot climbs stiffly out of his seat, pushing up his goggles, and puckers his eyes in the light of the lanterns as he fumbles for his cigarette case. "Got

Digitized by Google

'em," he says laconically. "Seaplane sheds on the mole. Time for another trip?"

There is time, it appears. He drinks hot coffee while the armourers snap a fresh supply of bombs into the holders and test the release gear. He answers questions curtly and his replies are very much to the point.

Their "Archies" are shooting well, and they've got a lot more searchlights at work than they had last time. Rather warm work while it lasted. He thinks No. 1 was hit and brought down in flames. No. 2 seemed to have engine trouble this side of our lines on the way back. No. 3 ought to be along soon. And while he gulps his coffee and grunts monosyllables there is a whirring overhead and No. 3 returns, loudly demanding a fresh supply of bombs with which to put an artistic finish to a row of blazing oil-tanks.

They climb into their machines again and lean back resting, while the finishing touches (which sometimes come between life and death) are put to the machines and their deadly freight. Then once more they soar up into the night.

Dawn is breaking when No. 4 returns, tired-eyed, and more monosyllabic than ever. It came off all right, but No. 3 had seemed to lose control and slid down the beam of a searchlight with shells and balls of red fire (some new stunt, he supposed) bursting all about her. However, she got her bombs off first, and touched up something that sent a flame 200 feet into the air. He himself bombed a group of search-

Digitized by Google

lights that were annoying him, and some trucks in a railway siding. The speaker has an ugly shrapnel wound in the thigh and observes with grave humour that his boots are full of blood—this is a Navy joke, by the way. Also that he could do with a drink.

But it came off all right.

Now the seaplanes, who undertake much the same sort of job, keep pigs, and contemplate their stern mission with an extinguishable and fathomless sense of humour. This may be accounted for by the fact that in life and death they are more in touch with the native element of the Navy-that-Floats and share much of its light-heartedness in consequence.

Aerial gymnastics are not in their line. They fight when they must, and the straightest shot wins. If hit, unless hopelessly out of control, they take to the water like a wounded duck. If the damage is beyond temporary repair they sit on the surface and pray for the dawn and a tow from a friendly destroyer.

No aerial adventure is ever recounted (and the array of medal ribbons round their mess table is witness to the quality of these blindfold flights) without its humorous aspect well-nigh obliterating all else. One who fought a Zeppelin single-handed with a Webley-Scott pistol and imprecations found himself immortalised only in the pages of a magazine of Puck-like humour they publish (Fate and funds permitting) monthly. Another, disabled on the water

Digitized by Google

off an enemy's port, succeeded in getting his engine going as the crew of an armed trawler were leaning over the bows with boat-hooks to secure him. He rose from the water beneath their outstretched hands, and recalled with breathless merriment nothing but the astonishment on their Teutonic faces. A third, similarly disabled, was approached on the surface by a German submarine. He raked her deck with his Lewis gun and kept her at bay—by the simple expedient of picking off every head that appeared above her conning-tower—until she wearied of the sport and withdrew. From a seaplane point of view it was a pretty jest.

At the conclusion of a day's aerial fighting on the Somme front a certain officer of the Navy-that-Flies was asked how he felt about it.

"Wa-al . . ." he drawled, and paused, groping in his mind for metaphor. "It's jest like stealing candy from a kid."

Making all allowances for poetic licence, this is a very fair illustration of the spirit in which the Navy-that-Flies went about the business. On the other hand there were a few who took a graver view of their responsibilities.

Among the possessions of one of the naval squadrons co-operating with the Army-that-Flies along the front is a foolscap manuscript notebook bearing the superscription *Notes on Aerial Fighting.* The youthful author of these notes will never handle either pen or "joy-stick" again, but he has left behind him a

Digitized by Google

document that is, in its way, one of the epics of war literature. It has since been printed (in expurgated form), and has doubtless found its way into text-books and treatises on the subject. But to be appreciated to the full it should be read in the original round, rather boyish handwriting, within hearing of the continuous murmur of the British guns and the drone of a scouting fighter passing overhead.

It contains ten commandments, which, for a variety of reasons, need not be recapitulated here. But the introduction epitomises the spirit of them all:

"The man who gets most Huns in his lifetime is the man who observes these commandments and fights with his head. The others either get killed or get nerves in a very short time and the country does not get the full benefit of having trained them."

The commandments conclude with the following exhortation: "A very pleasant (*sic*) help in time of trouble is to put yourself in the enemy's place and view the situation from his point of view. If you feel frightened before an attack, *just think how frightened he must be!*"

The Navy-that-Floats possesses for its "pleasant help" an awesome volume of some 946 pages (not counting Addenda), entitled *The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.* Yet in all its pages there is not one clause which can compare with this brave sentence: for this is youth speaking to youth, for the guidance and comfort of his soul.

Now in one of the squadrons of the Navy-that-

Digitized by Google

Flies there are three flight leaders, and the sum total of their ages is fifty-nine. The youngest, whatever his birth certificate may testify, looks something under sixteen. Of him it is related that in his early youth, having brought down a hostile machine within the British lines and captured the two occupants (with Iron Crosses complete), he approached a certain general, demanding transport for his prisoners —covering them the while with an automatic pistol.

"Transport?" said the general. "Where d'you want to take them?"

"To my squadron headquarters," was the grave reply. "I'd like to keep 'em for a bit. I'd like the others to see 'em."

"Damn it," replied the General, "they ain't canaries. Certainly not. Send 'em to the cages with the rest of the prisoners."

The victor flew sorrowfully homewards, and on arrival gave it as his opinion that professional jealousy was the ruination of the Junior Service. . . .

They are not given to talking over-much of their achievements in the hearing of a stranger within their gates. The second youngest of the trio admitted, contemplating his cow-hide boots, to have "done-in" twelve hostile machines in single combat—and lapsed into agonised silence.

"Of course," said the third, coming to the rescue of a comrade in palpable distress, "N., the star Frenchman, is the fellow to talk if you want to hear some good yarns." The speaker had the grave,

Digitized by Google

sweet face of a mediæval knight, and the owner of the cow-hide boots shot him a swift glance of gratitude.

"*He's* done-in fifty Huns," he confirmed, nodding.

It was on the following day, as it happened, that Fate introduced the Frenchman to the Stranger within the Gates of the Navy-that-Flies. The flying man landed on one of the aerodromes of the Navy-that-Flies, a florid-faced young man, chubby and blue-eyed. The squadron strolled out to greet him with ready hospitality and hero-worship.

"*Bon jour,* N.," said the squadron commander. "How goes it?"

The famous French fighting pilot swung himself out of his machine and pulled off his gauntlet. He wore, in addition to the regulation flying helmet, a bright-blue muffler wound with many turns round the lower part of his face, and a soiled aquascutum with a row of medal-ribbons reaching half-way across his breast. The wind fluttered its skirts, disclosing a pair of tight red breeches above top-boots of a light yellow. As an additional protection against the cold his feet were encased in fur moccasins. He greeted the Navy-that-Flies in rapid French and threw their ranks into some disorder.

"Translate, George," said the squadron commander.

"He says he's on sick leave," exclaimed one of the hosts. "He's just flying to keep his eye in. He scuppered five Boches last week."

Digitized by Google

"Si," said the Frenchman, nodding, and held up his hand with outstretched fingers, *"Cinq!"*

"Good on you, old sport," said the squadron commander. They shook hands again, and the remainder clustered rather curiously round the sinister machine with the black skull and cross-bones adorning its fusilage.

"Makes one sort of sorry for the Hun, doesn't it?" said one musingly.

"George," said another, "ask him what that doo-hickie on the muzzle of his gun's for." He indicated a detail on the mounting.

The Frenchman explained at some length, and the interpreter interpreted.

"Bon!" said the squadron commander.

"Oui," said the Frenchman, *"tres bon!* You 'ave not eet—*cette—comment dites vous?*—doo-hickie? No?"

"No," was the reply, *"mais nous* blooming well *allons——"*

The Frenchman presently climbed back into his machine and took his departure. The squadron commander summoned his chief armourer, and for a while deep called to deep.

"He's a red-hot lad, that Frenchman," said the squadron commander, when the chief armourer had gone. "I fancy he only came down to let us see that doo-hickie of his on his gun. You ought to hear some of his yarns, though."

The Stranger within the Gates of the Navy-that-

Digitized by Google

Flies gazed after the aerial speck against the blue of heaven, and his soul was glad within him, because it was all the purest Navy.

"That's all right," he said. "But what I should like to know is, what the deuce is a doo-hickie?"

"A doo-hickie?" replied the squadron commander. "A doo-hickie? H'm'm. George, how would you describe a doo-hickie?"

The officer appealed to puffed his pipe in silence for a moment. "Well," he said at length, "you know more or less what a gadget's like?"

"Yes."

"And a gilguy?"

"Yes."

"Well, a doo-hickie is something like that, only smaller as a rule."

There was a silence. Then the squadron commander leaned forward and flicked a speck of fluff off the shoulder of the Stranger within their Gates.

"There you are!" he exclaimed triumphantly—"*that's* a doo-hickie!"

"Have a drink, anyway," said the officer who answered to the name of George, soothingly.

The Stranger within the Gates of the Navy-that-Flies had the drink, and from then onwards forbore to ask any more questions.

But he still sometimes wonders what the functions of a doo-hickie might be.

Digitized by Google

Univ. of California

CHAPTER IV

"Lest We Forget"

I. H.M.S. "SHARK"

H.M.S. *Shark,* under the command of Commander Loftus W. Jones, went into action about 5.45 p.m. on May 31st, 1916, with a complement of ninety-one officers and men; of that number only six saw June 1st dawn.

In spite of the soul-shaking experience through which they passed, these six men have remembered sufficient details of the action to enable the following record to be pieced together. Many stirring acts of gallantry and self-sacrifice, and much of interest to the relatives and friends of those who were lost, must inevitably be lacking from this narrative. But the evidence shows such supreme human courage and devotion to duty in the face of death, that, incomplete as it is, the story remains one of the most glorious in the annals of the Navy.

At two o'clock on the afternoon of May 31st the *Shark* and three other destroyers, *Acasta, Ophelia,* and *Christopher,* were acting as a submarine screen to the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron, with the light

Digitized by Google

cruisers *Chester* and *Canterbury* in company. The force was steaming on a southerly course in advance of the British Battle Fleet, which was engaged in one of its periodical sweeps of the North Sea.

This advance squadron was under the command of Rear-Admiral the Hon. Horace A. L. Hood, C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O., flying his flag in *Invincible*.

The main Battle Cruiser Fleet and the Fifth Battle Squadron were considerably farther to the southward, and at 2.20 p.m. the light cruisers attached to this force signalled by wireless the first intimation that the enemy's fleet was at sea. Subsequent reports confirmed this, and acting on the information contained in these intercepted messages, Rear-Admiral Hood ordered the ship's companies to "Action Stations," and shaped course to intercept the advancing enemy.

At 3.48 p.m. the Battle Cruiser Fleet and the Fifth Battle Squadron engaged the German Main Fleet and turned north with the object of drawing the enemy towards the British Battle Fleet. It must be remembered that at this point the enemy was presumably in complete ignorance of the approach of the British Main Fleet. The weather was hazy, with very little wind and patches of mist that reduced the visibility to an extent that varied from one to eight miles.

At 4.4 p.m. Rear-Admiral Hood received orders from Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief, to proceed at full speed with his squadron and

Digitized by Google

reinforce the Battle Cruiser Fleet; the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron altered course as necessary, and an hour and a half later the first sounds of firing reached them out of the mists ahead.

The first faint intermittent murmur of sound increased momentarily as the two forces converged, and at 5.40 p.m. the haze on the starboard bow was pierced by flashes of gunfire; a few minutes later a force of German light cruisers and destroyers became visible, heavily engaged with an unseen opponent to the westward.

Fire was immediately opened and Rear-Admiral Hood turned to starboard, bringing the enemy on to the port bow of his squadron. Three light cruisers, a flotilla leader, and ten destroyers were now visible, the latter apparently turning to launch a torpedo attack upon the Third Battle Cruiser Squadron. The four destroyers who had hitherto been disposed in two subdivisions, one on each bow of the *Invincible,* were thereupon ordered to attack the enemy. Led by Commander Loftus Jones in the *Shark,* the division swung round, and hurled itself at the German force, opening fire with every gun that would bear.

In the meanwhile the enemy opened a heavy, though ill-directed fire on the battle cruisers. A large proportion of the salvos were falling short, and the British destroyers had in consequence to advance through a barrage of fire which surrounded them on all sides with columns of water and bursting shell.

In spite of their numerical superiority, the Ger-

Digitized by Google

man destroyers turned away in the face of this determined onslaught, and Commander Loftus Jones, satisfied that the intended torpedo attack on Rear-Admiral Hood's squadron had been frustrated, and having fired two of his three torpedoes, turned sixteen points to regain his position on the bow of the *Invincible*. The remaining three destroyers followed in his wake.

Three German battle cruisers had then appeared out of the mist in support of the enemy light cruisers, and the gallant division, with *Shark* at their head, turned under a concentrated deluge of shells from the entire German force.

A fragment of a projectile struck the *Shark's* wheel, shattering it, and wounding the coxswain, Petty Officer Griffin, on the right hand. The captain immediately ordered the after wheel to be manned and followed the coxswain down the ladder to the shell-torn upper-deck to con the ship from aft. The yeoman of signals, Petty Officer Banham, who up to this point had been the third occupant of the bridge, hurried after the captain.

The enemy were now using shrapnel, and the captain was wounded in the thigh and face as he reached the bottom of the ladder. He stumbled aft, endeavouring to staunch the flow of blood with his hands, to find on reaching the engine-room hatchway that a shell had burst inside the engine-room, and the main engines and steering gear were completely disabled. The coxswain had been struck at the same

Digitized by Google

time as the captain, and dropped insensible from a wound in the head. The foremost gun, under the command of Sub-Lieutenant Vance, had been blown away, and only one survivor of its crew lay badly wounded amid the wreckage.

The *Shark* was then lying with disabled engines helpless under a heavy fire, and Lieutenant-Commander John O. Barron, who commanded the *Acasta*, and had been second in the line, gallantly brought his destroyer between the *Shark* and the enemy's fire, and signalled to ask if he could be of any assistance. The captain of the *Shark* was then aft, cheering and encouraging the crews of the midship and after guns. The yeoman of signals, who remained at his side, read the signal and reported it to the captain, who replied, "No. Tell him to look after himself and not get sunk over us."

The yeoman of signals accordingly semaphored Commander Jones's last signal to the division under his orders, and the *Acasta* followed in the wake of the other two boats which were rejoining the battle cruisers.

It is probable that at this juncture Rear-Admiral Hood sighted the British Battle Cruiser Fleet, which he had been ordered to reinforce, and proceeded to carry out his orders. The Third Battle Cruiser Squadron vanished into the mist, and the enemy closed in upon the *Shark*, which lay rolling helplessly in the swell, blazing defiance from her after and midship guns.

Digitized by Google

The after gun was almost immediately put out of action and its crew killed and wounded. Amid a hail of shrapnel bullets and flying splinters the spare torpedo was hoisted off the rack, and, under the directions of the captain, was being launched into the tube, when it was struck by a shell and burst with a violent explosion, causing heavy casualties.

Only one gun, the midship one, now remained in action. The ship was settling down by the bows and every moment she shuddered with the impact of a fresh hit. The riven upper-deck was a shambles, and the dead, mingled with shattered wreckage, were blown hither and thither by the blast of exploding shell. Projectiles, pitching short, flung great columns of water into the air, or passed screaming overhead; the upper-works were riddled by splinters from bursting salvos.

One by one the wounded crawled brokenly into the lee of the casings and funnels in pitiful attempts to find shelter; among them knelt the devoted figure of the surgeon, (Surgeon-Probationer Robert Walker, R.N.V.R.) endeavouring single-handed to cope with his gallant, hopeless task. When last seen he was bandaging a man who had lost a hand when the torpedo exploded. He was then himself severely wounded, and was apparently shortly afterwards killed.

The enemy had then closed in to a range of about 1,500 yards; the survivors of the engine-room staff had come on deck and the captain ordered the col-

Digitized by Google

lision-mats to be placed over the shot-holes, and every attempt to be made to plug them and keep the ship afloat. This was accordingly done under the direction of Lieutenant Ernest T. Donnell, the first lieutenant, who appears to have been still unwounded, and maintained a cheering spirit of indomitable pluck to the last. The coxswain, who had recovered consciousness, though half-blinded by blood from his wound, superintended a party who under the captain's orders were turning out the boats and endeavouring to launch the rafts. The boats were smashed by shell-fire while still at the davits, but three rafts—two regulation life-saving rafts, and an extemporised affair of four barrels lashed together—were placed in the water.

In the meanwhile the midship gun, under the command of Midshipman T. Smith, R.N.R., maintained a steady fire. The stock of percussion tubes threatened to run short at one time, and the gunner, Mr. W. Gale, though severely wounded, crawled down below and fetched a fresh supply, shortly after which he was killed. Leading Signalman Hodgetts, who had been previously working as one of the ammunition supply party, was blown overboard by the explosion of a shell; a few minutes later his dripping figure appeared over the rail, and he coolly resumed his work; by some curious freak of chance he was again blown overboard by the blast of a shell, but again he clambered back to his place of duty, and his death.

Digitized by Google

The crew of the midship gun was ultimately reduced to two men, Able Seaman Howell, the gunlayer, and Able Seaman Hope. The midshipman trained the gun while Hope loaded and Howell fired. The captain stood beside the gun giving them the range, heartening the remnant of the crew by his example of cool courage. Howell, who had been severely wounded, eventually dropped from loss of blood, and the captain took his place. A moment later he was himself struck by a shell, which took off his right leg above the knee.

He lay on the deck in the rear of the gun while the coxswain and a chief stoker, named Hammell, between them improvised a tourniquet from a piece of rope and fragment of wood. While they were endeavouring to stop the bleeding, Commander Loftus Jones, in the words of an eyewitness who survived, "gentleman and captain as he was," continued to direct the firing of the gun.

In all history the unquenchable spirit of man has rarely triumphed so completely over shattered nerves and body. As his strength ebbed, Commander Loftus Jones seems to have been overtaken by fear lest the ship should fall into the hands of the enemy, and seeing the German destroyers approaching, he gave orders for the *Shark* to be sunk. A moment later, however, the gun fired another round; and apparently realising that the ship was still capable of further resistance, he countermanded the order, adding "Fight the ship!"

Digitized by Google

The gaff on the mainmast at which the Ensign was flown had been broken by a shot, and the flag hung limp against the mast. The mind of the captain must have turned at the last to that emblem of all he was dying for so gallantly, for presently he asked faintly what had happened to the flag. One of the men tending him replied that it had been shot away, and in great distress he ordered another to be hoisted immediately.

Able Seaman Hope accordingly left the gun, and climbing up, detached the ensign and handed it down to Midshipman Smith, who bent it on to a fresh pair of halyards and hoisted it at the yard-arm. The captain, seeing it once more flying clear, said, "That's good," and appeared content.

The end was now drawing very near. The bows of the *Shark* had sunk until the foremost funnel was awash, and the waves were lapping over the water-logged hull. Seeing that two German destroyers had approached to within a few hundred yards with the evident intention of administering the *coup de grâce*, Commander Loftus Jones gave his last order to the ship's company, "Save yourselves!"

He was helped into the water by the coxswain and a number of others who had tended him devotedly after he received his mortal wound, and floated clear of the ship with the support of a life-belt. The remainder of the crew, to the number of about a score, swam towards the rafts and pieces of floating wreckage.

Digitized by Google

Two torpedoes struck the *Shark* amidships almost simultaneously. With a muffled explosion she lurched violently to starboard, flinging overboard the dead and wounded who still remained on deck. Her stern rose until it was almost perpendicular and she sank with colours flying, about an hour and a half after firing her first shot.

Stoker Petty Officer Filleul and Able Seaman Smith succeeded in placing the captain on the raft of barrels, where they propped him in a sitting position with the aid of lifebelts and buoys. While this was being done the captain attempted to smile, and shook his head, saying, "It's no good, lads."

Stoker Petty Officer Filleul remained by the captain, and Able Seaman Smith swam to one of the other rafts on which the coxswain, Petty Officer Griffin, Chief Stoker Newcombe, Yeoman of Signals Banham, Stoker Swan, and Able Seamen Hope and Howell had succeeded in crawling. The three rafts drifted within sight of each other through the long northern summer twilight.

Shortly after the *Shark* sank, the British battle cruisers swept past in pursuit of the enemy. The captain asked if the pursuing ships were British. Filleul replied that they were, and the captain said, "That's good!"

Not long afterwards his head fell forward and his gallant spirit fled.

The second life-saving raft had been so damaged by shell-fire that only two men could be accommo-

Digitized by Google

dated upon it. The two most severely wounded (one of them had lost a leg) were helped on to it by a number of others who themselves clung to the edge, among them being the first lieutenant. Able Seaman Smith, on the other raft, realising that the majority were badly wounded, and being himself only slightly hurt, swam over to render what assistance he could. The first lieutenant, who had unfailingly cheered and comforted the stricken little band, presently asked if any could still sing, and then, without faltering, himself began:

"Nearer, my God, to Thee."

Those who had the strength joined in as they clung submerged up to their shoulders in the icy water, almost unrecognisable from the thick black oil which floated on the surface; and so, one by one, death overtook them. Able Seaman Smith alone survived more than a couple of hours.

While it was still light the British Battle Fleet was sighted through the mists, and the drenched, haggard figures on the other raft cheered it as it passed five miles away. With indomitable optimism they all clung to the hope of a speedy rescue, and Able Seaman Howell semaphored across the waste of water "We are British," in the hope that it would be read by one of the distant ships.

The twilight deepened into dusk, and the raft on which Able Seaman Smith alone survived was lost to sight. The six occupants of the other sat with the

Digitized by Google

waves washing over them, nursing their wounds and debating the prospects of being picked up. The yeoman of signals rambled into delirium at times, and finally said, "I must have a sleep. . . . Let me get my head down."

Able Seaman Hope attempted to dissuade him, but without avail. "I must sleep," he insisted pathetically, and as he stretched himself in the bottom of the raft the ruling instinct of the Service came back through the mists of death. "Give us a shake if the captain wants anything," he said, and his loyal spirit passed to join that of his captain.

Shortly before midnight the distant lights of a steamer were sighted. Able Seaman Howell then remembered for the first time that he had fastened a Holmes light with wire on one of the rafts a few days previously. Steadying himself with difficulty on the pitching raft, he fumbled along the edge and presently found the little tin cylinder that was to prove their salvation. With the last remnants of his failing strength he wrenched the nipple off, and the carbide, ignited with the water that washed over them, burnt with a bright flare. They waved it frantically and tried to shout: but the flare had been seen, and presently out of the darkness loomed the hull of the Danish s.s. *Vidar*. Her captain brought the ship alongside the raft, and one of her boats, which had already picked up Able Seaman Smith off his raft, presently rejoined them.

All survivors have testified to the high courage of

Digitized by Google

Able Seaman Hope. Throughout the whole ordeal his plucky personality came constantly to the fore, and he alone retained strength to climb on board the *Vidar* unaided; on reaching the upper-deck he refused to go below or receive any attention until the remainder of his shipmates had been hoisted on board.

The *Vidar* cruised in the vicinity for upwards of two hours in the hope of picking up further survivors, and Stoker Petty Officer Filleul was seen floating on the water and rescued as he was losing consciousness. No further traces of the *Shark's* crew were found, however, and the *Vidar* shaped course for Hull. On the passage Chief Stoker Newcombe, who had been wounded at the commencement of the action, succumbed to exhaustion in spite of every endeavour to save his life.

His Majesty the King, in recognition of the valour of the captain, officers, and men of the *Shark*, granted Commander Loftus W. Jones the only posthumous honour that can be awarded in either Service, the Victoria Cross. The six survivors, each of whom had played his part with the utmost gallantry, were decorated with the Distinguished Service Medal.

A few weeks after the action the fishermen of the little village of Fiskebackskie on the coast of Sweden, found washed ashore the body of Commander W. Loftus Jones, V.C. It was buried in the village churchyard on June 24th, with every token of sympathy and reverence.

Digitized by Google

II. H.M. DESTROYERS "SWIFT" AND "BROKE"

1917 found the German public mentally in the position of a man waiting to be hanged. Any distraction was better than the contemplation of the future.

The aim of destroyer raids on Calais and Dover was primarily to afford the German populace this distraction. At the worst it was intended to provide headlines in the newspapers that bore some semblance of naval success, and the determination of the German Government to ensure these headlines, regardless of their relation to facts, can be best seen by a comparison between the British and German official *communiqués* of such actions.

A merely spectacular performance could usually be bought cheaply enough. The two German destroyer bases within striking distance of the British coast are Zeebrugge and Ostend. The latter is approximately the same distance from Dover as Brighton is. Once clear of their minefields on a chosen night a German force is in the unique position of knowing that every single object encountered afloat is an enemy. Homing merchant traffic and patrolling vessels, manned by seamen whose vigilance has been subjected to the unrelaxed tension of nearly three years' sea-going under war conditions, can be fired on at sight.

A swift dash through the darkness, with a finger twitching on the trigger of every gun; any spot in

Digitized by Google

thirty-five miles of British coastline decided upon beforehand can be reached in a couple of hours, illumined in ten seconds by star-shell for the few minutes required for a futile bombardment of English soil—and the desired result is achieved.

One disadvantage alone is against Germany, and it is one which may be borne in mind at a time when there is a tendency to regard surface sea-power as an anachronism. A raider disabled outside the protection of German minefields is a raider lost. Nothing can venture to her succour within the areas of the successive British commands along the coast. Where she is crippled there she must lie, and, eventually, be captured. A raiding destroyer force, if caught, must therefore endeavour to escape at all costs.

This is a consideration not without influence in destroyer methods of attack, and the contrast between British and German tactics and traditions was never better demonstrated than on the night of April 20-21st, 1917.

The movements of the German raiding force on the night of April 20th may or may not have been those described in the German *communiqué*. In neither case have they any bearing upon subsequent events. The British destroyer leaders *Swift* and *Broke*, on night patrol in the Channel, were proceeding on a westerly course, when, at 12.40 a.m. the *Swift* sighted an enemy flotilla, on the port bow, proceeding in the opposite direction at high speed. The night, though calm, was intensely dark, and when first

Digitized by Google

sighted the enemy were within 600 yards range. Simultaneously the fire-gongs on board the German destroyers were heard to ripple down the line and in a blaze of flashes they opened fire.

The *Swift* instantly replied, and the commanding officer, Commander Ambrose M. Peck, decided without hesitation to ram the leading enemy destroyer. At his order the wheel was wrenched round, and the *Swift,* with every occupant of her bridge temporarily blinded by flashes, drove straight for the enemy.

Now it must be realised that the operation of ramming one of a line of destroyers, dashing through pitch darkness at between twenty and thirty knots, is an exceedingly delicate one. An initial miscalculation of a few degrees of helm, a few revolutions of the propellers more or less, spell failure. Failure may, and probably does, mean being rammed by the next boat in the enemy line.

The *Swift* missed, but shot through the line unscathed. She turned like a hawk upon a quarry and, in turning, neatly torpedoed another boat in the line. Again she dashed at the leading boat, which once more eluded her, and, without firing another shot, made off into the darkness at full speed with the *Swift* in pursuit.

On first sighting the enemy, the *Broke,* commanded by Commander Edward R. G. R. Evans, C.B., was steaming about three hundred yards astern of *Swift.* Upon the latter altering course to ram the leader, the *Broke* launched a torpedo at the second boat in

Digitized by Google

the line, which hit her, and then opened fire with every gun that would bear. The five enemy boats, stoking furiously for full speed, emitted a dull glow from every funnel which lit their upper-works and enabled the captain of *Broke* to decide upon his tactics. Altering course away from the enemy for a moment to gain impetus for the blow, he swung round to port and rammed the third boat at full speed, fair and square abreast the after funnel.

Locked together thus the two boats fought a desperate and literally hand-to-hand conflict. The *Broke* swept the enemy's decks at point-blank range with every gun from four-inch to pom-pom and maxim. Lumps of coal and bowls of cocoa are mentioned among the miscellany of objects that hurtled through the darkness.

In the meanwhile the remaining two destroyers in the German line poured a devastating fire upon the *Broke*. The foremost guns' crews were reduced from eighteen men to six, but Midshipman Donald A. Gyles, R.N.R., in charge of the forecastle, though wounded in the eye, kept all foremost guns in action, himself assisting the depleted crews to load.

While he was thus employed, a number of frenzied Germans swarmed up over the *Broke's* forecastle out of the rammed destroyer, and finding themselves amid the blinding flashes of the forecastle guns, swept aft in a shouting mob. The midshipman, amid the dead and wounded of his gun's crews and half-blinded by blood, met the rush singlehanded

Digitized by Google

with an automatic revolver; he was grappled by a gigantic German who attempted to wrest the weapon from him.

Cutlasses and rifles with fixed bayonets being among the equipment of the foremost guns' crews in anticipation of just such events as were now taking place, the German was promptly bayoneted by Able Seaman Ingleson. The remainder of the invaders, with the exception of two who lay down and feigned death, were driven over the side. The two exceptions were subsequently made prisoners and taken below to supper.

Of the original five German destroyers, there were now two remaining in the line. Two minutes after ramming, the *Broke* succeeded in wrenching herself free from her sinking adversary, and turned to ram the last boat in the line. She failed in this achievement, but as she swung round succeeded in hitting this boat's consort on the stem with a torpedo.

Hotly engaged with these two fleeing destroyers, the *Broke* then attempted to follow *Swift* in the direction in which she was last seen; a shell, however, struck *Broke* in the boiler-room, disabling her main engines. The enemy were then lost to sight in the darkness.

Still carrying considerable way, *Broke* altered course and headed in the direction of a destroyer heavily on fire, whose crew, on sighting the *Broke,* sent up loud shouts for mercy. She was burning fiercely, and, regardless of the danger from her

Digitized by Google

magazines exploding, *Broke* steered towards her, still moving slowly through the water. The shouts and cries of "Save! Save!" were redoubled, when she unexpectedly opened fire.

Broke being then out of control and unable to manœuvre or extricate herself, silenced the treachery with four rounds and then, to ensure her own safety, fired a torpedo and hit her amidships.

In the meanwhile the *Swift* had continued her pursuit of the leading boat until injuries she had received in the earlier phases of the action, though in themselves slight, prevented her from maintaining full speed. She thereupon abandoned the chase and turned in search of a fresh quarry. The outline of a stationary destroyer was presently sighted in the darkness ahead, and as she drew near a confused noise of voices resolved itself into more distinct and evidently organised sounds, as from a large number of men shouting together in time.

Warily, and somewhat perplexed by the uproar, the *Swift* approached with her guns trained on the stranger. This presently resolved itself into the sinking German destroyer that had been rammed by *Broke,* whose crew were bellowing in unison:

"WE SURRENDER! WE SURRENDER!"

With a not unreasonable suspicion of treachery, the *Swift* awaited developments. Apparently realising their breath would be wanted for more ener-

Digitized by Google

getic measures, the crew of the German destroyer presently stopped shouting. She heeled slowly over, while her ship's company hastily took to the water, and sank stern first.

As no other enemy appeared to be in sight, and the action, which had lasted approximately five minutes, appeared to be over, the *Swift* switched on searchlights and lowered boats to rescue the swimmers.

Swift and *Broke* then proceeded to exchange details of the "bag" by the medium of a flashing lamp and (*Broke's* circuits having been cut) an electric torch. Their respective ship's companies having given vent to some pardonable exhilaration by cheering each other out of the darkness till they were hoarse, both British destroyers anchored and patiently awaited the dawn.

The British casualties were comparatively light, and the spirit of the wounded is epitomised by the conduct of the *Broke's* coxswain, Able Seaman William G. Rowles; this man, though hit four times by shrapnel, remained at the wheel throughout the action, and finally only betrayed the fact that he was wounded by reporting to his captain, "I'm going off now, sir," and fainting.

A number of wounded presented themselves at the sick-bay for the first time on the day following the action. Their excuses for this delay were various, but that of a stoker with a piece of shrapnel still in his head is perhaps the most ingenuous:

Digitized by Google

"I was too busy, sir," he exclaimed to the surgeon. "Along of clearing up that rubbish on the stoker's mess-deck."

III. THE DRIFTER PATROL, DOVER

Another German destroyer raid into the English Channel on the night of February 14th-15th, 1918, had for its primary aim the destruction of the Auxiliary Patrol Forces on outpost duty. This much

THE DOVER PATROL.

was evident from the deliberate and systematic manner in which, once touch was established in the inky darkness, the attack was carried out. A large force was chosen for the enterprise, comprising ten at least of Germany's largest and fastest destroyers; that these succeeded in sinking seven armed fishing vessels and returning to their base without being intercepted by the British patrols proper can only be as-

Digitized by Google

cribed to accurate foreknowledge of the disposition of these forces (information readily supplied by aerial reconnaissance), and the luck of the Devil who favours his own.

The raiding tactics of German destroyers have already been described in detail. It will be admitted that they provide the enemy with an initial advantage of which he might reasonably be expected to make the most. Indeed the wonder is not so much that they were not intercepted in the inky darkness of a thousand square miles, but that they did not make more of their opportunity.

On the night in question one of the Drifter Patrol had sighted a submarine on the surface, attempting to break through the vigilant cordon of patrol craft. Off went the drifter in jubilant pursuit, signalling to her consorts to join the hunt, and the remainder joined her like a pack of bassett hounds on the trail of an otter. The enemy destroyers, casting about in the darkness, sighted the "Tally-ho!" rocket and swept down upon the drifters, intent upon their own business, from at least four quarters simultaneously. The Germans appear to have worked in pairs; the leading boat of each couple switched on a blinding searchlight for the few seconds necessary to get an accurate range, and then the whole force slowed down to carry out the deliberate work of destruction. In the words of one of the survivors, "It was awfu'—juist slaughter." The speaker made the statement without heat or reproach; he was a fisher-

Digitized by Google

man, as were most of his brethren, wont to accept both calamity and fortune without emotion. "Girt ole black things . . ." he added, and shook his grizzled head so that the sunlight winked on his gold earrings.

The enemy closed in nearly all cases to within fifty yards of their victims, poured two salvos of high-explosive shell into each, and passed on. They had no time for fancy shooting and there were few misses. It is to be hoped they found the gruesome work to their taste.

In one case a German destroyer misjudged her distance and came so close to her victim that she was unable to depress her guns sufficiently to bring them to bear on the little target. She fired as she rolled instead, and the drifter *Cloverbank* turned on the instant into a splintered shambles, buried in clouds of steam and rocketing sparks. Only one man survived the first salvo, Deckhand Plane, R.N.R. (Trawler Section). He blundered forward to the gun through the flames and fumes of bursting shell, and finding it loaded, returned the fire at pointblank range, single-handed, half-blinded, stupefied by smoke and din.

It was brave work, but all round him in the darkness amid the flames of guns and blazing ships and all the savagery of that onslaught, the Drifter Patrol was taking its gruel not a whit less gallantly. The survivors launched their splintered dinghies, carrying their wounded with them, and paddled clear of the blazing wrecks that a few minutes before had been

Digitized by Google

ship and home. The two enginemen of the *Violet May,* Engineman Ewing and Engineman Noble, succeeded in launching their boat, and lowered into it the mate, mortally wounded, and a wounded deckhand. The remainder of the crew lay inextricably entangled in the blazing wreckage, dead. The survivors paddled clear, waited till the enemy had passed on, and then closed their little ship again. The fire had hold of her forward, steam was pouring from her wrecked engineroom, and the ammunition was exploding broadcast about her decks. "A doot she's sinkin'," said Ewing stoutly. Noble said nothing: he was not given overmuch to speech, but he made the painter fast and proceeded to climb inboard again. Ewing followed and between they fought and overcame the fire. "Dinna leave me, Jamie," cried the mate piteously; "dinna leave me in the little boat." "Na, na," was the reply. "We'll na leave ye," and presently they brought their wounded back on board and took them below again. The mate was laid on his bunk and Ewing fetched his shirts from his bag and tore them up into bandages. "An' them his dress shirts," murmured Noble. It was his first and last contribution to the narrative. They took turn and turn about to tend the wounded, plug the shot-holes, and quench the smouldering embers of the fire, reverently dragging the wreckage from off their dead, and comforting the dying mate in the soft, almost tender accents of the Celt.

"'Tis nae guid," said the mate at last. "Dinna

Digitized by Google

fash about me, lads. A'll gang nae mair on patrol," and so died. But they saved their little ship, and she lies in a corner of the basin at her base, a mass of twisted metal and charred woodwork, to testify to the courage of the British fisherman in war.

The night's work counted for a *German* victory, and had it not been for the pitiful *braggadocio* of the German official *communiqué,* one would have been tempted to leave it at that. True that seven little fishing craft with a gun in each bow would never make port again, *but seven more took their places before the sun was over the horizon on the morrow of the affair.* Three score or so of British seamen had finished their life's trick and passed to their long watch below. But England and the Channel Patrol have the story of their passing: the pity is that it must here be so brief.

It was a rather pathetic gathering that mourned its dead that Sunday morning in the grey church by the quayside at Dover, with the painted sunlight streaming down through the stained-glass windows, lighting the weather-beaten faces of skippers and deckhands, trimmers and enginemen of the Trawler Reserve. There was, moreover, in their solemn faces a trace of faint hurt bewilderment, like that on the face of a child that has bumped its head in the dark.

They were only fishermen, for all their brass buttons and blue uniforms and plentiful display of D.S.C.'s and D.S.M.'s; simple folk accustomed to

Digitized by Google

judge life by its tangible results. They were not concerned with strategy or the might-have-been. They had been accustomed to look to their big brothers, the destroyers, in the simple faith of children when there was trouble, and for once it seemed they had looked in vain. They had had a drubbing, and they took it according to the tradition of British seamen; but the puzzled, grieving look remained.

The captain of the Drifter Patrol marched them away from the church and talked to them, standing on a drum of paint in the more familiar environment of coils of wire, floats, nets, mine-cases, and all the grim impedimenta of their calling. It was in no sense of the word a speech, but it was a very moving little address. "Never fear," he concluded; "we'll take tea with the Hun before you're all much older, or I'll eat my hat." It takes a brave man to prophesy concerning war these days, but the men of the Drifter Patrol stumped back to their little craft comforted, and, as events transpired, he was right.

In the dark hour preceding dawn on March 21st (five weeks later) the British destroyers *Botha* (Commander Roger L' E. M. Rede, R.N.) and *Morris* (Lieutenant-Commander Percy R. P. Percival, R.N.), and the three French destroyers *Mehl, Magon,* and *Bouclier* were on patrol in the eastern waters of the Channel, when a sudden outburst of firing was heard to the northward. Vivid flashes of gunfire out to sea made it plain that the enemy was

Digitized by Google

engaged upon a futile bombardment of the crumbling bathing-sheds of deserted French watering-places.

The Allied force promptly made for the flashes at full speed, led by *Botha*; star shell fired in an endeavour to light up the enemy and obtain their range however merely had the effect of quelling the bombardment and scattering the raiders, who were never seen again.

The patrolling force then proceeded to search to the northwestward in the hope of intercepting any divisions of the enemy who had ventured more into mid-channel; star shell were fired at intervals, for the night was misty, and presently one of these bursting ahead revealed the shadowy outline of a force of enemy destroyers and torpedo boats sneaking off through the darkness in the direction of their base.

The *Botha* challenged, and an unfamiliar reply winked at them out of the night; the next instant British and French were pouring a heavy fire into the enemy. For a few minutes a grim little fight ensued. The Allies rapidly overhauled the raiders, and set the darkness ablaze with flashes of gunfire and blazing wreckage flying broadcast from shell bursting on impact. A running fight between torpedo craft is like a battle between scorpions; whichever gets a sting home first rarely has need to strike again. None of the German torpedoes found their mark, but the *Morris*, emerging from a smoke screen flung out by the fleeing enemy, cut off a German destroyer of a large type and torpedoed her at 500 yards

Digitized by Google

range. She blew up and sank almost immediately, heeling over amid clouds of steam and vanishing stern first.

In the meanwhile, *Botha's* main steampipe had been severed by a stray shell and she immediately commenced to lose her way through the water. Her commander, realising that if he was to finish his "cup of tea with the Hun" he must needs drink it quickly, fired both torpedoes at the leading boats, and, putting his helm hard over, rammed the fourth boat in the line cleanly amidships. His speed had dropped considerably, but it sufficed to drive the knife-edged bows of the *Botha* clean through, cutting the enemy completely in half.

Botha then swung round and attempted to repeat the coup on the next astern; the Hun succeeded in eluding the *Botha's* crippled onslaught, but fell a victim to the French destroyers. She lay disabled and ablaze, and they closed and pounded the flaming wreck with torpedo and gun fire as a man grinds a dead snake under his heel.

Morris by this time had relinquished the pursuit, having lost the quarry in the smoke and mist; she returned to the scene of action, and took her lame sister in tow while the French destroyers circled round in the grey dawn picking up prisoners. From statements made by these, it appears that no less then eighteen torpedo craft had sallied forth for the raid. They were unhesitatingly attacked and rather badly mauled by two British and three French destroyers

Digitized by Google

and fled (as one of the British officers picturesquely described it) like scalded dogs.

The adventures of the remaining fifteen were by no means terminated when they quitted French waters, leaving three of their number behind. A squadron of the R.N.A.S. bombing machines proceeding up the coast on business sighted the homing German flotillas and fell upon them—or rather, suffered their bombs to do so. They reported having completely thrown the enemy into disorder and scattered them in all directions. A squadron of enemy seaplanes that had gone out at dawn to look for the wanderers then encountered the escort fighters of the bombing machines, and in a very short time had their numbers reduced by four. Of these, three were accounted for by one British pilot.

It must have been with feelings of more than ordinary relief that the German torpedo force sighted the long grey mole of Ostend Harbour through the morning mist. But even then their nerves had yet another ordeal to face. Something rushed across the face of the water in a cloud of spray apparently from nowhere, a sinister unseen thing travelling at incredible speed. A torpedo struck the stern of one of the German destroyers, and the cloud of spray tore away through a hail of shell and bullets, unscathed, and vanished in the mist.

Digitized by Google

IV. H.M.S. "MARY ROSE."

H.M.S. *Mary Rose* left a Norwegian port in charge of a west-bound convoy of merchant ships in the afternoon of October 16th, 1917. At dawn on the 17th, from her position ten or twelve miles ahead of the convoy, flashes of gunfire were sighted astern. The captain of the *Mary Rose,* Lieutenant-Commander Charles Fox, who was on the bridge at the time, remarked that he supposed it was a submarine shelling the convoy, and promptly turned his ship to investigate; all hands were called to action stations. *Mary Rose* had increased to full speed, and in a short time three light cruisers were sighted coming towards them at high speed out of the morning mist; *Mary Rose* promptly challenged, and receiving no reply, opened fire with every gun that would bear at a range of about four miles. The German light cruisers appeared to have been nonplussed by this determined single-handed onslaught, as they did not return the fire until the range had closed to three miles. They then opened fire, and the *Mary Rose* held gallantly on through a barrage of bursting shell until only a mile separated her from the enemy. Up to this point the German marksmanship was poor, but as the British destroyer turned to bring her torpedo tubes to bear, a salvo struck her, bursting in the engine-room, and leaving her disabled, a log on the water. All guns, with the exception of the after

Digitized by Google

one, were out of action, and their crews killed or wounded, but the after gun continued in action under the direction of Sub-Lieutenant Marsh, R.N.V.R., as long as the gun would bear. The captain came down from the wrecked bridge and passed aft, encouraging and cheering his deafened men. He stopped beside the wrecked remains of the midship gun and shouted to the survivors of its crew: "God bless my heart, lads, get her going again, we're not done yet!"

The enemy were now pouring a concentrated fire into the motionless vessel. One of the boilers, struck by a shell, exploded, and through the inferno of escaping steam, smoke, and the vapour of bursting shell, came that familiar, cheery voice: "We're not done yet."

As the German light cruisers sped past, two able seamen (Able Seaman French and Able Seaman Bailey), who alone survived among the torpedo tubes' crews, on their own initiative laid and fired the remaining torpedo. Able Seaman French was killed immediately, and Able Seaman Bailey badly wounded. Realising that the enemy had passed ahead, and that the 4-inch gun could no longer be brought to bear on them, the captain set about destroying his ciphers. The First Lieutenant (Lieutenant Bavin), seeing one of the light cruisers returning towards them, called the gunner and bade him sink the ship. The captain then gave the order, "Abandon ship." All the boats had been shattered

Digitized by Google

by shell fire at their davits, but the survivors launched a Carley raft and paddled clear of the ship. The German light cruiser detailed to administer the *coup de grâce* then approached to within 300 yards and poured a succession of salvos into the already riddled hull. The *Mary Rose* sank at 7.15 a.m. with colours flying. The captain, first lieutenant, and gunner were lost with the ship, but the handful of survivors, in charge of Sub-Lieutenant J. R. D. Freeman, on the Carley raft, fell in some hours later with a lifeboat belonging to one of the ships of the convoy. Sailing and rowing, they made the Norwegian coast some forty-eight hours later, and were tended with the utmost kindness by the Norwegian authorities. All survivors unite in testifying to the cheerful courage of the senior surviving officer, Sub-Lieutenant Freeman, throughout the last phase of this ordeal. Able Seaman Bailey, who, despite severe shrapnel wounds in the leg, persisted in taking his turn at the oar, is also specially mentioned for an invincible light-heartedness throughout.

The distinguished naval critics with whose assistance we are wont to belittle the achievements of our Navy, will have doubtless much to say about this action. From the point of view of tactics, it lies open to unquestionable criticism. Unhappily, there is no record of what was in the mind of the captain of the *Mary Rose* when he made that single-handed dash in the face of such preposterous odds. The convoy which was in his charge lay ahead of him, and,

Digitized by Google

as he apparently supposed, was being attacked by the gunfire of a hostile submarine. When, on rushing to the rescue, he realised that it was to meet not a submarine, but three of Germany's newest and fastest light cruisers, it is conceivable that the original intention of rescue was not supplanted in his mind by considerations of higher strategy. He held on unflinchingly, and he died, leaving to the annals of his service an episode not less glorious than that in which Sir Richard Greville perished.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

The Feet of the Young Men

HE was nearer seventy than sixty: that is to say, he was an old man as they reckon age afloat. There was a stoop about his shoulders that hinted at the burden of his years, but his eyes, blue and direct beneath ragged white eyebrows, were young enough; and a man's eyes are the mirrors of his spirit.

He stood on the quarter-deck of the armed yacht under his command, pacing slowly to and fro, with those craggy brows almost meeting above his great beak of a nose. There had been a day when a fleet would have trembled at the portent, and walked delicately, like Agag. That was when he was an admiral though, and the flag-lieutenant would have popped his head into the secretary's cabin and murmured, "Blowing up for a storm—stand by!" Now, as he stalked with that unforgettable jerky stride of his up and down the narrow confine of the yacht's poop, he was only a commander of the Royal Naval Reserve—a "dug-out" from the Retired List—with three curly rings of lace on the cuffs of a monkey-jacket cut in a style unfamiliar to the present generation.

Digitized by Google

Aft by the ensign-staff he halted, and pulled a letter out of the breast-pocket of the quaintly-cut monkey-jacket. It had come by the morning mail, a typewritten letter, on paper bearing the crest of Admiralty, and it was worded as tactfully as circumstances and the nature of the contents would allow. It referred to the strain of war under modern conditions. It reminded the Admiral that a critical stage of the world conflict had now been reached; and the two postulates taken in conjunction pointed to the necessity for young men being employed in all commands afloat. Their lordships had therefore decided, with regret . . . etc. etc.

That letter did what the strain of modern war had not yet done—it made the Admiral's hand tremble: he tore it into small pieces and dropped them over the side. The stoop of his old shoulders seemed to have become suddenly accentuated. His firm mouth slackened: he looked what they said he was, an old man.

"Youth will be served," said he, and watched the last scrap of paper float away on the tide. "I daresay they know best. . . . They think they do . . . anyway, that's something, nowadays." Then he drew forth an enormous bandana handkerchief, trumpeted a blast of defiance from his historic nose, and stumped forward to the bridge to take his last command to sea for the last time.

. . . . . .

Digitized by Google

It was late the following afternoon, when the yacht was upon the port bow of a convoy of merchantmen, that the look-out at the crosstrees gave tongue. The Admiral was in the chart-house, sprawling affectionately over the chart with notebook and pencil. He enjoyed having the chart-house to himself these days. The flag-captains and navigators of bygone flagships had always bored him, fussing at either elbow whenever he looked at a chart. . . .

"Periscope port bow!" bawled the lookout, and simultaneously the alarm gongs jarred at every gun position and action station. The Admiral was beside the quartermaster in two bounds.

"There she goes, sir," cried the officer of the watch, and indicated with outstretched finger the wicked streak of bubbles that flickered in the wake of a torpedo: it passed ahead, but through his glasses the Admiral was watching the sparkling water for the periscope's feather.

He sighted it almost on the instant, half a mile abeam, an object no bigger than a broom-handle above the wave-tops.

Once, thirty years before, in a moment of crisis, he had acted as he did then. It was a wholly unconstitutional proceeding, but on the former occasion it had averted a collision between two battleships of the line. On both occasions it saved a few precious seconds. He grasped the spokes of the wheel with his own hands and wrenched the helm hard-a-star-

Digitized by Google

board before the quartermaster realised he was at his elbow.

The officer of the watch had sprung to the telegraph, and down below the gongs were ringing madly for full speed.

The yacht's owner had built her for speed. He was a rich man, and could afford to gratify a whim. In this case he gratified it to the utmost designer and engineers were capable of; but never till this moment had a rich man's craze been so completely justified. Her knife-edge swan bows clove the dancing waves in twin sickles of spray as she heeled over to her helm and then steadied on the mark that was already swiftly dipping before the unexpected onslaught.

The periscope vanished thirty seconds before the yacht passed over the wash of the unseen scourge: but as it passed the Admiral jerked a lever twice, and turned, staring aft down the broken wake that had obliterated all traces of the submarine. By means of the lever he had released a couple of explosive charges, and as he stood shading his eyes from the sun, two great columns of foam leaped into the air.

"Hard-a-starboard!" he croaked, and over went the helm again. He stepped to the gun control voice-pipe: "Stand by the port guns!" and as he gave the order a greenish-brown cylindrical shape, streaked with rust and spouting oil from gaping seams, appeared in the centre of the boiling scum and foam left by the explosion. Slowly it righted itself, and

Digitized by Google

the hull and conning-tower of a submarine lay on the surface with a heavy list. As the yacht swung round, the port guns opened fire: a shell burst on the armoured conning-tower, shattering the periscope and blowing great fragments of steel high into the air. Another penetrated the hull and exploded internally, clouds of vapour pouring from the rents in the shell. The coxswain steadied the wheel, heading the bows straight for the great whale-like object.

Now the cunning of an old seaman is the cunning of a grey fox. The Admiral held up his hand, and the officer of the watch jerked the telegraphs to "stop." The stern of a vessel driven at high speed is drawn down by the thrust of the propellers. The moment the engines stop, the stern rises again and the bows dip. In this case they dipped as they struck the submarine squarely just abaft the conning-tower, and clove through the rounded hull like a hatchet through a fungus.

They had a glimpse on either bow of the halves of a submarine, still kept afloat by the buoyancy of her tanks and closed compartments. It was only a momentary glimpse—of glistening, shattered machinery and mangled bodies, of hands raised in prayer or anguish. . . . Then both broadsides broke out, pouring a salvo at pointblank range into those smoking segments that vanished amid the flames of bursting shell and leaping water.

They rescued one prisoner—as is not infrequently the case, the captain. Him the Admiral caused to

Digitized by Google

be warmed and dried and restored with hot drinks while the yacht, assisted by two destroyers, rounded up the scattered convoy. Then the Admiral interrogated his prisoner. "You are very young," he said at the conclusion of the interview.

The Prussian clicked his heels. "It is a young man's war," he said.

"So they tell me," replied the Admiral dryly.

. . . . . .

His relief was waiting on the quay beside his baggage when the yacht—her dainty bows looking like the features of a professional pugilist—tripped back to harbour. He was a young lieutenant-commander, fresh from the Grand Fleet—a contemporary, in fact, of the Admiral's son. And early the following morning the Admiral went over the side—not as he might have done ten years earlier, with guard and band, to the shrill twitter of a pipe. He paused at the gangway, and laid his left hand on the younger man's shoulder.

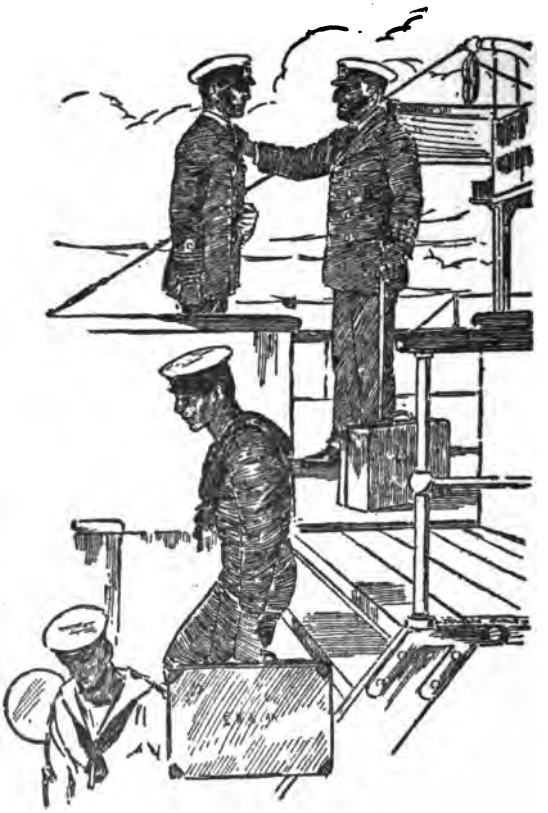
"The race is to the swift," he said, "the battle to the strong. Good luck to you, my lad. You want a bigger gun forward, if you can get 'em to give it to you, and remember she turns quicker on port helm. . . . She's a good little ship."

"Thank you awfully, sir," said the lieutenant-commander. "She's a ripping little ship, and I'm only sorry I'm——"

The Admiral doffed his cap after the manner in which a forgotten naval generation saluted.

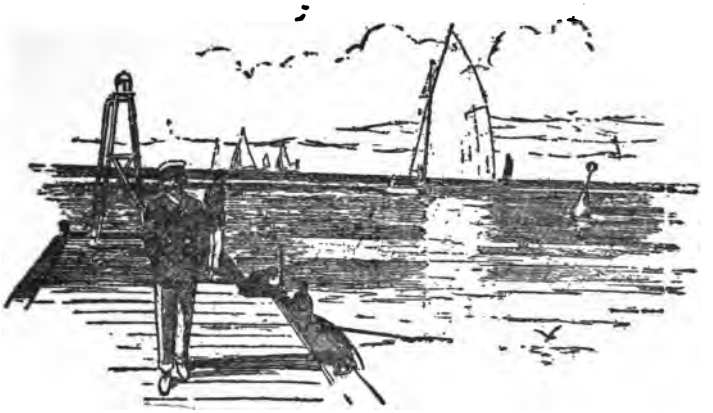
Digitized by Google

"Be damned to your sorrow, sir," he said. "It's a young man's war," and turned to descend the ladder to the dinghy that waited alongside.



THE FEET OF THE YOUNG MEN.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER VI

Gipsies of the Sea

AUGUST 4th, 1914, probably found the yachtsmen of Great Britain less unprepared for war with Germany than any other civilian community in the Empire.

Men turn to the sea as a profession for a variety of reasons; but the amateur yachtsman embraced the sea as a mistress with a complete and very genuine passion. To those who seek her thus, the sea has much to tell; she will whisper a thousand secrets 'twixt dusk and dawn to the little ships resting snug in her curlew-haunted creeks, or riding lazy to a long cable in the lee of desolate sand-banks—things denied to the busy wayfarer on her wide thoroughfares.

Digitized by Google

Yachtsmen as a class are meditative folk. A man who spends his week-ends alone, or in the company of one other in a three-ton yacht, has opportunities for reflection denied to the devotees of other pursuits. He learns more than the ways of the tides and Primus stoves.

In the queer, uneasy tranquillity of the decade before the war there came in gradually increasing numbers to our east and south-east coasts an unobtrusive visitor. Few people encountered him, because he chose sequestered places to visit, but the yachtsman met him, talked much with him, and afterwards sat in the cuddy and smoked many pipes, thinking about him and his unholy thirst for information.

There were other yachtsmen, of a more restless and inquiring turn of mind, who went farther afield with lead-line and compass, "observin' 'ow the world was made." Where the short yellow seas stumbled across leagues of shoals, and windmills and the brown sails of barges broke the sky-line above low-lying sand-hills, they learned and saw many things. One even wrote a book about these things,[1] that he who ran might read. The trouble was that people ashore entrusted with the destinies of Empire were running about so busily that they hadn't time to read. They were catching votes and such-like, as children snatch at falling leaves in autumn. So the yachtsman carried on yachting and cultivating the acquaintance of the slow-speaking, slow-moving shippers of

[1] *The Riddle of the Sands.*

Digitized by Google

the coast-wise traffic and the crab-gaited community that manned the east-coast fishing craft. Useful men to know sometimes at the pinch of a sudden crisis.

Then, with the red dawn of August 4th, 1914, came war at last, and the yachtsman pulled a deep breath of something like relief, knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and went ashore, forbearing to say "I told you so" to the harassed Whitehall officials he went in search of. This was a war of the sea, and the yachtsman clewed up his business ashore, sent his wife to stay with her mother, and placed all his knowledge of the coasts of Northern Europe and the seas between them at the disposal of the Navy.

Now the Navy was very busy. Like the yachtsman, it had not been altogether blind to signs and portents, because the sea is a wonderful conductor of electricity—and other things. But it had its own theories on naval warfare: among others it opined that, properly speaking, this was an affair of big ships and frequent battles. To fight battles you require dexterity in the use of weapons—highly scientific and technical weapons at that. They themselves had been learning to wield these weapons since they were twelve years old or thereabouts. The yachtsman's acquaintance with lethal arms was limited to a 12-bore scatter-gun and a revolver, with which he enlivened Sunday afternoons becalmed by potting at empty bottles.

"Just wait till we've mopped up these fellows in

Digitized by Google

the North Sea," said the Navy—"it won't take long—and then we'll talk things over, old chap."

So the yachtsman waited, and after a while the Navy found itself waiting, because the fellows in the North Sea had retired to Kiel, thumped their chests and said they were waiting too. Thus modern naval warfare developed from glowing theory into rather wearisome fact.

The yachtsman had not been altogether idle in the meanwhile. He manned every available motor-boat in the kingdom, and patrolled the coast under the White Ensign with a rifle and a rather complicated signalling apparatus. When the supply of motor-boats ran out, the wealthier yachtsmen built their own, fitted them out at their own expense, and manned them. They manned them indiscriminately: one was a captain, another was a deck-hand, and yet another club-mate the engineer. It mattered not a whit how or where a man served as long as the spray was in their faces and the dawn came up out of their beloved sea. They messed together in cheerful communism, save when they found themselves under the immediate observation of the brass-bound Navy. Then they grew self-conscious and the captain fed in splendid isolation: the deck-hand, who was his next-door neighbour in Surbiton and owned a bigger yacht, touched his cap when he spoke and called him "sir."

The Navy noted these things and smiled—not derisively, but with affection, as men smile at dogs and

Digitized by Google

children. But it was also keenly observant: it was taking the measure of these enthusiastic amateurs, without undue haste, deliberately, parting reluctantly with ancient prejudice and shibboleth. This is the Navy's way.

The motor-boats did their work consistently well and without ostentation. They conducted an efficient examination service among the teeming coast-wise traffic of the south-east coast, through which not a needle could have been smuggled in a bargeload of hay: this was a duty for which the yachtsman was admirably suited. It required tact, for the pre-war coaster was a touchy fellow and accustomed to keep himself to himself: furthermore, it called for intimate co-operation with the Custom officers of coast and estuary ports; but these the yachtsmen had known and drunk a pot of beer with any time during the past five-and-twenty years.

The motor-boats found themselves shepherding wayward fishing fleets out of forbidden waters suddenly hedged about with incomprehensible prohibitions; they guarded them on their lawful occasions; and because they knew them and their fathers before them, knew also when to caution wrong-doers and when to confiscate nets and sails. This, it may be remarked in passing, is a wisdom not learned in paths ashore nor yet in the training colleges of the Navy. They served as tenders to the big ships and towed targets for the smaller ones. They brought battle cruisers their love-letters, and acquired both

Digitized by Google

skill and cunning in sinking floating mines with rifle-fire.

Thus, in due course, was their probation accomplished. The Navy had observed it all, mostly without comment or eulogy. But when the time was ripe it produced a standardised type of motor patrol boat, armed and equipped in all respects as little men-of-war.

"Now," said the Navy to the yachtsman, "shake hands as one of us, and then suffer us to train you for a little while—even to putting you wise about depth-charges and Hotchkiss guns—ere you have your heart's desire."

The yachtsmen leant an ear to the Navy Staff Instructors (wise men from a torpedo school called the "Vernon") with eager willingness. "But where," asked the Navy, "are the rest of you? There aren't enough to go round the boats we've ordered."

The yachtsmen, labouring at applied mechanics and the true inwardness of high-explosive bombs, said nothing. There had been a time when their numbers would have more than sufficed for all the country's needs. But some were lying under the sandy soil of Gallipoli, or the marshes of Flanders, and others were whittling model yachts out of bits of wood in Dutch internment camps: the roll of honour in well-nigh every yacht club in the kingdom supplied the answer. The matter was not one for either cavil or regret. A man can die but once, and so

Digitized by Google

long as he dies gloriously the region of discussion as to his whereabouts is passed.

Then came the oversea gipsies to fill the vacant places of those of their brethren who had finished their last long trick. From Auckland, Sydney, and Winnipeg they came; from Vancouver, Wellington, Toronto, and Montreal. They were strangers to Crouch and Solent, but the yachtsmen of England welcomed them into the mysterious indissoluble freemasonry of all sea-lovers, which under the White Ensign is called to-day the R.N.V.R.

Now, of their achievements in the Motor Boat Patrol worthier pens than mine have written. They have endured monotony—which is the lot of many in modern war—and, what is more difficult, have maintained their efficiency and enthusiasm throughout. They perform duties which are in no way connected with glory in any shape or form, and have been content to wait their turn for greater things with willing cheerfulness. And some have attained that glory, buying it lightly at the price of life.

Thus far we have attempted to record the doings of the small yachtsman—by your leave the truest of all sea gipsies. But there were others, owners of ocean-going steam-yachts and Atlantic Cup racers, whose experience of the sea differed little from that of the rugged professional. These, on the outbreak of war, proceeded to the nearest dockyard demanding guns, and men who could shoot them, in the King's name. They got the guns and the men, and

Digitized by Google

they reinforced the trawler patrol and examination service from the Shetlands to the Lizard. When it is remembered that few of these gallant sportsmen possessed masters' "tickets"; that 300-ton yachts are not built to keep the seas in winter off the outer Hebrides, and yet kept them: when the number of losses and groundings during the period they were commanded by amateurs is compared with the subsequent tale of their achievements under the professional seamen who succeeded them—then some true insight into the value of the deep-sea yachtsmen's work will be obtained. This is not the time to recount in detail the performances of the individual or his yacht. The Navy knows them, but the Navy, according to its wont, is silent. Some day, however, when the lawns that overlook the Solent are thronged once more, and the harbours of the Riviera again reflect the graceful outlines of these slim Amazons of the sea, smoking-room and tea tables will hear the tales—or some of them. And there will be some for ever untold, because the men who might have told them have passed into the Great Silence.

One story, however, will serve to illustrate the spirit in which the deep-sea yachtsman answered the call.

There was a certain man living overseas who at the outbreak of war was approached by his son. "I'm going over to enlist," said the boy. Now the boy's mother was an invalid, and this was the only son.

Digitized by Google

The father smoked in silence for a minute, considering his son's announcement.

"No," he replied at last, "not yet. If you are killed, your mother would die. I'll go over first."

His son laughed indignantly with the scorn of youth. "You're too old, dad," he said; "you're fifty-five."

"Fifty-three," amended the older man. "Fifty-three, and I've got a master's ticket." This was a man who raced his own yacht across the Atlantic in the days of piping peace. "But I'll act fair by you," he continued. "I'll go over and volunteer, and if they won't have me I'll come back and you can go instead—and God go with you."

They shook hands on the deal, and the older man went.

Volunteers of fifty-three—even with masters' tickets—were not being eagerly sought after in the Navy at the beginning of the war. The volunteer perhaps realised this, and so it happened that Whitehall accepted his age at his own estimate—forty-five.

It was older than he looked or felt; and if his clear eyes are any index to character it was the first and last lie he ever told.

His son awaited the return of the prodigal with some impatience; finally he received a letter bidding him to keep cheerful and look after his mother. His parent was at the time of writing in charge of an armed guard, nursing a leaky Norwegian wind-jam-

Digitized by Google

mer through a north-easterly gale in the region of Iceland. He eventually battled her and a contraband cargo into Stornoway, and got the first bath and dry clothes he had had for ten days. He said he was very happy and doing his bit; and this I hope and believe he still is.

. . . . . .

It is this love of the sea and familiarity with it in all its conditions that have served the R.N.V.R. officer in moments of stress in a manner which the frequent D.S.C.'s among them testify. But there are other incidents that have passed without such recognition because they came in the plain path of duty or were incidental to the sea-gipsy's love of adventure. One of these deserves mention, because the two great Reserve services, the R.N.R. and the R.N.V.R., joined hands in the affair and saw it through together.

Two divisions of British drifters were lying in a cross-Channel port awaiting orders to return to their base. It was in the winter, and a south-easterly gale was blowing. The subsequent meteorological records testify to its being the worst that year.

The order to return came to the senior officer of the drifters qualified by "as soon as the weather has moderated sufficiently." The senior officer of one division was an officer of the Royal Naval Reserve, and of the other a sub-lieutenant of the Volunteer Reserve. He of the R.N.R. looked at the sky and the breakers bursting in sheets of foam against the

Digitized by Google

breakwater and thence to the barometer, and opined that it wasn't good enough.

The R.N.V.R. sub-lieutenant said he was tired of harbour and guessed he'd have a bump at it. The R.N.R. sub-lieutenant damned his eyes for a fool, but made the signal for shortening cable in his own division. The gale abated slightly, and the two divisions wallowed out in line ahead through the flying scud.

In mid-Channel they encountered a 4,000-ton steamer, derelict and drifting, down by the head, before the gale. The R.N.V.R. man watched her sluggish plunge and scend in the steep wind-whipped troughs, and decided she wasn't as bad as she pretended to be.

"Take charge of both divisions of drifters," he signalled to his *confrère* in the tiny flagship of the other division, "and take them into harbour. I am going to board."

He then bade his skipper put his craft alongside the yawning derelict, and called for volunteers to accompany him. His men were no cowards, but they weren't tired of life, and most of them had wives and families. "I'll come," said the cook, however.

They ran down wind under the sheering bulwarks, and the R.N.V.R. sub-lieutenant and the cook leaped at a trailing fall, climbed up it hand over hand, and tumbled on to the deserted upper deck of the steamer.

In the meanwhile, the R.N.R. sub-lieutenant had

Digitized by Google

proceeded to windward, commended his command to their respective skippers, launched his cockleshell of a boat and drifted down in it, half-swamped, until he, too, was able to catch the fall, and so climbed inboard. He was in time to see the R.N.V.R. knock off the cable stoppers and let go both anchors. The drifters were swallowed by the mist and rain and proceeded to their base, calling on their gods to witness they were no cowards, but that there were limits to what a man could be expected to do for sheer love of adventure.

A swift survey of the derelict disclosed the fact that her No. 2 hold was flooded, either as the result of a mine or torpedo. On the other hand, all bulkheads were holding, and the engine-room was untouched. Said the R.N.R. man: "If we could get steam on her, I'd up killick and take this hooker into the Downs." But three men cannot raise steam and navigate a 4,000-ton steamer without assistance, so they made themselves comfortable and waited.

Late in the afternoon a destroyer arrived, the salt spume crusting her funnels, and the handflags busy above her bridge screens.

"Prepare to abandon derelict. Will go ahead and veer a grass-line," said the destroyer, in much the tone that a parent might adopt to an offspring who has nearly succeeded in getting itself run over by a motor-car.

"Well, now," said the R.N.V.R. to the R.N.R.,

Digitized by Google

"that's a funny thing: I'm bothered if I can read that signal. But my sight isn't what it used to be."

"I can make semaphore all right," replied the R.N.R., "but when it comes to reading it I get all of a dither. P'raps the cook can read it."

The cook replied at once that it was Greek to him, or words to that effect. The destroyer, accordingly, after waiting some time and growing more angry, went up to windward and anchored.

"Now," said the R.N.V.R. to the R.N.R., "you talked a lot about your semaphore. Just make them a signal to send us a dozen engine-room ratings and an engineer officer, and we'll raise steam and proceed to the Downs. Thank them for coming to see us, by the way. They're getting peevish."

The R.N.R., in terms of diplomatic suasion, signalled accordingly, and towards dusk a drenched boatload of the Royal Navy, Engine-room Department, arrived on board. Refreshed with Madeira from the captain's saloon, they proceeded to the engine-room, filled the boilers, lit the furnaces, and had steam raised by daylight. The steamer then slipped her cables, which had become too foul to weigh, substituted an Admiralty-pattern kedge for the lost anchors, and proceeded modestly under her own steam and the destroyer's escort to the Downs.

A month later the R.N.V.R. met the R.N.R. ashore.

" 'Member that derelict we salved together," said

Digitized by Google

the R.N.V.R. "I've been up to London to see about salvage and all that."

The R.N.R. brightened considerably.

"She's worth £120,000, light," he said.

"She is," was the reply, in detached tones such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer might employ to outline his Budget; "but she was on Government charter. As she was salved by"—he took a long breath—"Naval officers, there ain't any salvage."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

The Day—and the Morning After

LOOKING back on a kaleidoscope of great events, one is apt to be struck by the wealth of insignificant detail with which memory burdens itself. Of all the thunderous panorama in which a Fleet Action presents itself to the imagination, very little is recorded in the mind of a participant at the time. Later on a man may fit the details together into an orderly comprehensive tableau for the benefit of relations and others, supplying from hearsay and imagination all that he missed as an insignificant actor in the great drama.

Groping among the memories of the Battle of Jutland and the part played therein by the fleet flagship, it is not unnatural, therefore, that a private of marines should come most readily to mind. He it was who in enjoyment of his office of servant jerked aside the curtain of a cabin door about 3.15 p.m. on May 31st, 1916, and announced in laconic tones that the fleet was going to "Action Stations" in half an hour's time.

The Onlooker had kept the morning watch, and was engaged on his bunk in what is colloquially known as a "stretch off the land."

Digitized by Google

"Eh?" he said.

" 'Arf an hour," repeated the messenger of Mars. There was in his tone that note of impassive stoicism usually reserved for the announcement that the Onlooker's gold links had gone, in the cuffs of a shirt, to the wash—or similarly soul-shaking tidings. The latter descended from his bunk in search of the sinews of war.

"Where the devil's my gas-mask?" he queried, after a breathless search.

" 'Andy," replied the stoic. He rummaged in an obscure "glory-hole" and produced in turn his master's boot-cleaning gear, his own ditty-box, private stock of tobacco, fiancée's portrait, and finally his master's gas-mask. This, emptied of a further assortment of his personal possessions, he gravely handed to the Onlooker.

That worthy rapidly collected his remaining impedimenta and struggled into a "British warm"; as he did so certain obscure warnings of the distant past (those far-off days when we read handbooks and attended lectures on war in the abstract) came back to mind. "By the way," he said—"underclothing. In the Russo-Japanese war they always put on clean underclothing before going into action, I remember. Septic wounds, and all that. When did I have a clean shift last?"

His official valet closed his eyes, as if contemplating a vista of time greater than the human memory could in justice be expected to span. Finally he shook

Digitized by Google

his head gloomily. "Couldn't rightly say, but——"

"Never mind," interrupted the Onlooker hastily. "I haven't time now, anyway," and made for the door. His servant's impassive countenance softened; perhaps he was reflecting that they might never again foregather in that cabin. "It's goin' to be cold up there——" he jerked his head towards the upper-deck and forebridge, and eyed his master compassionately. "Better 'ave your woolly muffler—what your wife knitted for you."

The Onlooker was touched. "Thank you," he said. "If I may borrow it for the afternoon . . ."

. . . . . .

The clatter of cups and saucers in the neighbouring pantry guided his footsteps to the wardroom in search of tea. That the warning had gone round was evident from the prevalent wakefulness (unusual at that hour) of all the occupants of the mess. Everyone was garbed for the fray according to his prospective rôle or individual taste. Costumes ranged between cricketing flannels and duffle overalls with Balaclava helmets and sea-boots.

It might reasonably have been expected that one topic and one only—"Der Tag"—would have been on everyone's lips. The German Fleet was out: was even then being lured north by the battle cruisers, and the Fleet was rushing to meet it in battle-array. The hour for which the Fleet had waited twenty-two weary months was about to strike: and no one even mentioned it.

Digitized by Google

The affection was somehow peculiarly British. Drake epitomised it for all time when he declared there was time to finish the game and beat the Spaniards too; but it is a question whether the self-conscious imperturbality of that game of bowls on Plymouth Hoe equalled that of the Fleet flagship's wardroom as its members sat in noisy banter round the tea table, munching bread-and-jam with a furtive eye on the clock. . . .

It was left to the commander-in-chief's flag lieutenant to break the spell. He put down his cup with a clatter, picked up his telescope, and rose to his feet, fastening the toggles of his duffle coat.

"Well, boys . . . ?" he said, and walked towards the door as the bugles began to blare along mess-deck and battery.

. . . . . .

Concealment of his emotions is not a marked characteristic of the British blue-jacket or marine, whatever affectations may be cherished by his officers in that respect. The exultant speculations, prophecies, and thanksgiving of a thousand men, crowded in those confined spaces, met the ear with a noise like the sea. Commonplace sounds suddenly acquired a thrilling significance, and the clang of the securing chains of the guns as they were released, the tireless drone of the turbines far below, shrilling pipe and blare of bugle overhead, combined to set the pulses at a gallop. The Onlooker passed forward through that electrical tide of emotion and laughing men that

Digitized by Google

surged towards the hatchways, and *en route* overtook a leading seaman. He was normally a staid, unemotional individual, known best (from the standpoint of censor) as an incorrigible letter-writer. He was capering, literally capering, along the battery. And as he capered he shouted:

"They're out, lads! they're out! Christ! They're out this time!"

And out they were, for presently, on the wind that sang past the naked rails of the forebridge and the bellying halliards, came the first grumble of gunfire out of the haze ahead.

Perhaps it was the utter absence of colour, the dull grey monochrome of sea and sky, ships and smoke, that heightened the resemblance of what followed to the shifting scene of a cinema show. It robbed even dire calamity of all terror at the time. It seemed incredible that the cruiser on the starboard quarter, ringed all about with yeasty pinnacles of water, was one of ours, being hammered to extinction by the guns of an enemy invisible. The eye followed her dispassionately as she ran that desperate gauntlet of pitching salvos; and when the end came, and she changed in the flutter of an eyelid into a cloud of black smoke, it was some time before a subconscious voice said to the Onlooker: "There goes gallant Sir Robert . . . and you'll never shake Dicky Carter by the hand again. . . ."

. . . . . .

Digitized by Google

Equally remote and unreal were the effects of our own gunfire, seen and lost and glimpsed again in that ever-shifting North Sea haze. A crippled German destroyer, crawling out of range, down by the stern, like a hare whose hindquarters have been paralysed by a clumsy sportsman: an enemy light cruiser, dismasted, funnels over the side, one gun spitting defiance from a shambles of a battery as she sank: a great battleship listing over, all aswarm with specks of humanity—surely it was none of our noisy doing?

And then suddenly a salvo of 14-inch shells "straddled" us, and a yeoman of signals beside the Onlooker put out a hand and pulled him behind the shelter of a canvas wind-screen.

"Best get behind 'ere, sir," he said. Then the absurdity of it struck them simultaneously, and they both laughed.

. . . . . .

The insignificant duties of the Onlooker took him at a later phase in the action to the lower conning-tower. Situated far below the water-line and behind all the available armour, it is deemed the safest place in the ship, and is the salubrious resort of various seconds-in-command, waiting to step into the shoes of defunct superiors as occasion arose. They were not a cheerful company, since their rôle was *pro tem.* necessarily passive. Further, their knowledge of what was going on was limited to scraps of information that filtered down a voice-pipe from the upper conning-tower, through a variety of mediums all bus-

Digitized by Google

ily employed on other matters. The assistant constructor (sometime darling of International Rugby crowds) stood with his ear to the voice-pipe and wailed for news as a Neapolitan beggar beseeches alms. Suddenly he paused, and his face brightened.

"Disabled Zeppelin floating on the surface ahead," he announced. There was a general brightening of the countenances around. Followed a long pause. Then:

"Wash-out! Not a Zeppelin. Bows of a battle cruiser sticking out of the water."

"Good egg," said someone. "Another Hun done in."

It didn't seem to occur to anyone that it might not have been a Hun. As a matter of fact it was the *Invincible,* or all that was left of her.

. . . . . .

Outside the lower conning-tower a little group of messengers, electric light and fire and wreckage parties stood and discoursed. They were displaying an unwonted interest in the merits and demerits of swimming belts.

"Got yours on, Nobby?" inquired one boy-messenger of another.

"Yus," was the reply in tense grave tones. "An' if we sinks I'm goin' to save Admiral Jellicoe an' get the Victoria Cross."

This pious flight of fancy apparently rather took his friend's breath away, for there was a moment's silence.

Digitized by Google

"You can 'elp," he added generously. They were "Raggies" apparently. . . .

. . . . . .

Reaction came with the following dawn: a weariness of the soul that no fatigue of the flesh can equal. All one's energies seemed needed to combat the overwhelming desire for sleep, and the sensitive plate which records even absurdities in the mind holds little save one recollection of that dawn. But whatever has grown dim and been forgotten, the memory of a journey aft along the mess-deck in search of a cup of tea will always survive. The grey daylight struggled through the gunports and mingled with the sickly glare of electric lights along the narrow vista of the mess-deck. One watch of stokers had been relieved, and they lay where they had dropped on coming up from the stokehold. On every available inch of space along the deck sprawled a limp bundle of grimy rags that was a man asleep. It was like picking a pathway through a charnelhouse of ebon dead. They lay on their backs with outstretched arms, or face downwards with their arms under their foreheads, in every imaginable attitude of jointless, abandoned exhaustion. The warm, sour smell of perspiration mingled with the aftermath of cordite fumes. . . .

The guns' crews beside their guns were silent. They stood or sat, arms akimbo, motionless in the apathy of reaction and fatigue, following the passer-by with their eyes. . . .

Digitized by Google

Aft in the medical distributing station all was still as death. Men lay motionless, snoring beside the stretchers and operating tables. But as the Onlooker passed, something moved inside the arms of a sleeping man. A stumpy tail wagged, and the ponderous bulk of Jumbo, the mascot bulldog, rose, shook himself and trotted forward, grinning a greeting from one survivor of Jutland to another.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

The Navy-Under-the-Sea

THE year or so before the war found the Submarine Service still in its infancy, untried, unsung, a jest among the big-ship folk of the Navy-that-floats, who pointed with inelegant gestures from these hundred-feet cigar-shaped egg-shells to their own towering steel-shod rams and the nineteen-thousand-odd tons behind each of them.

The Submarine Service had no leisure for jests at that time, even if they had seen anything particularly humorous about the comparison. In an intensely grim and practical way they were dreamers, "greatly dreaming": and they knew that the day was not far off when these little wet ships of theirs would come into their own and hold, in the

Digitized by Google

bow and stern of each fragile hull, the keys of death and of hell.

The Navy-that-Floats—the Navy of aiguillettes and "boiled shirts," of bath-rooms and Sunday-morning divisions—dubbed them pirates. Pirates, because they went about His Majesty's business in football sweaters and grey flannel trousers tucked into their huge sea-boots, returning to harbour with a week's growth of beard and memories of their last bath grown dim.

The Submarine Service was more interested in white mice[1] than pirates in those days, because it was growing up; but the allusion stuck in the memory of one who, at the outbreak of war, drew first blood for the submarines. He returned to harbour flying a tiny silk Skull-and-Crossbones at his masthead, to find himself the object of the Navy's vociferous admiration, and later (because such quips exchanged between branches of the Naval Service are apt to get misconstrued in less-enlightened circles) of their Lordship's displeasure.

The time had come, in short, when it was the turn of the Submarine Service to develop a sense of humour: humour of a sort that was apt to be a trifle dour, but it was acquired in a dour school. They may be said to have learned it tickling Death in the ribs: and at that game he who laughs last laughs decidedly loudest.

[1] White mice were carried in the early types of submarines to give warning, by their antics, of an escape of gas.

Digitized by Google

The materials for mirth in submarine circles are commonly such as can be easily come by: bursting bombs, mines, angry trawlers, and the like. Things not in themselves funny, perhaps, but taken in conjunction—— However . . .

A sower went forth sowing; she moved circumspectly at night on the surface and during the day descended to the bottom, where her crew slept, ate sausages and fried eggs and had concerts; there were fourteen items on the programme because the days were long, and five instruments in the orchestra. For two nights she groped her way through shoals and sand-banks, negotiating nineteen known minefields, and only the little fishes can tell how many unknown ones. Early in the third night she fixed her position, completed her grim sowing (thereby adding a twentieth to the number of known minefields within a few square miles off the German coast) and proceeded to return home. At dawn she was sighted by two German seaplanes on patrol; she dived immediately, but the winged enemy, travelling at a hundred miles an hour, were on top of her before the swirl of her dive had left the water.

Now it must be explained that a certain electrically controlled mechanism in the interior of a submarine is so constructed that if any shock throws it out of adjustment, a bell rings loudly to advertise the fact. As the submarine dived, two bombs dropped from the clouds burst in rapid succession dangerously adjacent to the hull.

Digitized by Google

The boat was still trembling from the concussion when sharp and clear above the hum of the motors rang out the electric bell referred to.

"Maria," said a voice out of the shimmering perspective of machinery and motionless figures awaiting Death, "give the gentleman a bag of nuts!"

In spite of nearly three years of war, the memory of the days when the big Navy laughed at its uncouth fledgling has not altogether died away from the minds of the Submarine Service. Opportunities for repartee come none too often, but they are rarely missed.

Now the branch of the parent Navy with which the Submarine Service has remained most in touch is the department concerned with mines and torpedoes. The headquarters of such craftmanship is properly a shore establishment: but following the custom of the Navy it retains the name of the hulk from which it evolved, and is known in Service circles as H.M.S. *Vernon*.

A certain submarine was returning from what (to borrow a phrase from German naval *communiqués*) may be described as an enterprise. It was one which involved a number of hazardous feats, not least of which was navigating submerged in an area from which the enemy had removed all buoys and lights, and was patrolling with destroyers and Teutonic thoroughness.

The submarine was proceeding thus at slow speed

Digitized by Google

with her crew at their stations. Their countenances wore expressions similar to those on the faces of the occupants of a railway carriage travelling through a tunnel. One, a red-pated man, tattooed like a Patagonian chieftain, sat with his lips pursed up in a soundless whistle, watching a needle flicker on a dial, while he marked time to an imaginary tune with his foot.

A sharp metallic concussion jarred the outer shell of the fore compartment. It was followed a second later by another, farther aft, and then another. Six times that terrible sound jolted the length of the boat, and then all was silence. The noise made by a mine striking a submarine under water is one few have lived to describe, yet every man there interpreted it on the instant.

They waited in the uncomfortable knowledge that mines are sometimes fitted with delay-action fuses which explode them some seconds after impact. Then suddenly the tension broke. For the first time the red-headed man took his eyes from the dial, and his foot stopped its noiseless tattoo.

"Good old *Vernon!*" he said sourly. "Another blasted 'dud'!"

Once clear of their own bases and the sight of war signal stations, the submarine is an outlaw on the high seas, fending for itself in the teeth of friend or foe. True there is an elaborate system of recognition signals in force, but the bluff seamen in command of the armed auxiliaries that guard the sea-

Digitized by Google

ways round the coast have a way of acting first and talking afterwards. It is the way of the sea.

A homing submarine on the surface encountered one of these gale-battered craft, and in spite of vehement signals found herself under a rain of projectiles from the trawler's gun. Realising that the customary signals were of no avail, the commanding officer of the submarine bethought him of a still more easily interpreted code. The second-in-command dived down the conning-tower, snatched the tablecloth off the breakfast table, and together they waved it in token of abject surrender.

The trawler ceased fire and the submarine approached near enough to establish her identity with hand-flags. The white-bearded skipper of the trawler was moved to the depths of his Methody soul.

"Thank God!" he signalled back, "thank God I didn't hit you!"

"Amen!" replied the hand-flags, and then after a pause: "What did *you* do in the Great War, daddy?"

Those who go down to the bottom of the sea in submarines are wont to say (in public at all events) that since they gave up groping among the moorings of the Turkish minefields in the Narrows, very little happens to them nowadays that is really exciting.

This of course is largely a question of the standard by which you are accustomed to measure excitement. Half an hour's perusal of the official reports made by the captains of these little wet ships on return

Digitized by Google

to harbour almost leads to the supposition that each writer stifled his yawns of boredom with one hand while he wrote with the other.

Yet to the initiated Death peeps out half a dozen times in the length of a page, between the written lines in which he is so studiously ignored. The culmination of years of training, ten seconds of calculated judgment and a curt order, which cost the German Navy a battleship, is rendered thus into prose: "5 a.m. Fired both bow torpedoes at 1,200 yards range at last ship in line. Hit. Dived."

But let us begin at the beginning. . . .

At three o'clock one summer morning a British submarine was sitting on the surface admiring the face of the waters. There was a waning moon, and by its light she presently observed a line of German light cruisers stealing across her bow. She waited, because they were steering west, and it is not the custom of such craft to go west alone; two minutes later she sighted the smoke of five battle cruisers also going west. She allowed the leading ship to come within 800 yards and fired a torpedo at her; missed, and found herself in the middle of a broadside of shell of varying calibres, all pitching unpleasantly close. She dived like a coot, and with such good-will that she struck the bottom and stopped there for a quarter of an hour putting things straight again.

At 4 a.m. the submarine climbed to the surface and found two squadrons of battleships blackening

Digitized by Google

the sky with smoke, screened by destroyers on all sides and brooded over by Zeppelins. She fired at two miles range and missed the flagship, halved the range and fired again—this time at the last ship in the line—and blew a hole in her side through which you could drive a motor omnibus. She then dived to a considerable depth and sat and listened to the "chug" of the destroyers' propellers circling overhead and the detonations of their explosive charges. These gradually grew fainter as the hunt moved away on a false trail.

The submarine then came up and investigated; the remainder of the German Fleet had vanished, leaving their crippled sister to the ministrations of the destroyers, who were visible casting about in all directions, "apparently," says the report dryly, "searching for me." The stricken battleship, with a heavy list, was wallowing in the direction of the German coast, sagging through a right-angle as she went. The menace that stalked her fetched a wide circle, reloading on the way, and took up a position ahead favourable for the *coup de grâce*. She administered it at 1,500 yards range and dived, praising Allah.

Later, having breakfasted to the accompaniment of distant explosions of varying force, she rose to the surface again. It was a clear sunny morning with perfect visibility; the battleship had vanished and on the horizon the smoke of the retreating destroyers made faint spirals against the blue.

Digitized by Google

Since British submarines specialise in attacking enemy men-of-war only, their operations are chiefly confined to waters where such craft are most likely to be found. Those who read the lesson of Jutland aright will therefore be able to locate roughly the area of British submarine activity.

In the teeth of every defensive device known to Kultur, despite moored mines, explosive nets, and decoys of fiendish ingenuity, this ceaseless patrol is maintained. Winter and summer, from sunset to dawn and dawn to sunrise, there the little wet ships watch and wait. Where the long yellow seas break in clouds of surf across sandbanks and no man dares to follow, they lie and draw their breath. Their inquisitive periscopes rise and dip in the churning wake of the German minesweepers themselves. They rise out of the ambush of depths where the groundswell of a forgotten gale stirs the sand into a fog; and an unsuspecting Zeppelin, flying low, lumbers, buzzing angrily, out of range of their high-angle gun.

Here too come other submarines, returning from a cruise with the murder of unarmed merchantmen to their unforgettable discredit. They come warily, even in their own home waters, and more often than not submerged; but they meet the little wet ships from time to time, and the record of their doubtful achievements remains thenceforward a song unsung.

A British submarine on patrol sighted through her periscope the periscope of another submarine.

Digitized by Google

So close were the two boats that to discharge a torpedo would have been as dangerous to one as the other, and the commanding officer of the British boat accordingly rammed his opponent. Neither boat was travelling fast, and he had fully three seconds in which to make his decision and act on it.

Locked together thus, they dropped down through the depths; the German blowing all his tanks in furious efforts to rise; the other flooding every available inch of space in a determined effort to force his adversary down and drown him.

Now the hull of a submarine is tested to resist the pressure of the water up to a certain depth; after that the joints leak, plates buckle, and finally the whole structure collapses like a crumpled egg-shell. With one eye on the depth-gauge the British lieutenant forced the German down to the safety limit and, foot by boot, beyond it. Then gradually they heard the enemy begin to bump along their bottom; he had broken away from the death-lock and was rolling helplessly aft beneath their hull. The sounds ceased and the needle on the dial jerked back and began to retrace its course. The British submarine rose, to contemplate a circle of oil slowly widening on the surface in the region of the encounter.

Few of these grim games of Peep-bo! are without a moral of some sort. A gentleman adventurer within the mouth of a certain river was aware of a considerable to-do on board flag-draped tugs and river-craft; he himself shared in the universal elation

Digitized by Google

on sighting through his periscope a large submarine, also gaily decked with flags, evidently proceeding on a trial trip. He waited until she was abreast of him and then torpedoed her, blowing her sky-high. Remained then the business of getting home.

Dashing blindly down towards the open sea with periscope beneath the surface, he stuck on a sand-bank and there lay, barely submerged. A Zeppelin at once located him: but in view of his position and the almost certain prospect of his capture, forbore to drop bombs; instead she indicated his position to a flotilla of destroyers and stood by to watch the fun. The commander of the submarine raised his periscope for a final look round and found a destroyer abreast his stern torpedo tube. He admits that things looked blackish, but there was the torpedo in the tube and there was the destroyer.

He fired and hit her; the next instant, released from the embrace of the mud by the shock of the discharge, the submarine quietly slid into deep water and returned home.

In big brass letters on an ebonite panel in the interior of the submarine is her motto—one word: RESURGAM.

There are both heights and depths attainable by the Spirit of Man, concerning which the adventurer who has been there is for ever silent. His mother or his wife may eventually wring something out of him, but not another man. Readers of the following

Digitized by Google

narrative must therefore content themselves with the bald facts and the consolation that they are true. What the man thought about during his two hours' fight for life: how he felt when Death, acknowledging defeat, opened his bony fingers and let him go, is his own affair—and possibly one other's.

Disaster overtook a certain British submarine one day and she filled and sank. Before the engulfing water could reach the after-compartment, however, the solitary occupant, a stoker petty officer, succeeded in closing the watertight door. This compartment was the engine-room of the boat, and, save for the glimmer of one lamp which continued to burn dimly through an "earth," was in darkness.

Now it happened that this solitary living entity, in the unutterable loneliness of the darkness, imprisoned fathoms deep below the wind and sunlight of his world, had a plan. It was one he had been wont to discuss with the remainder of the crew in leisure moments (without, it may be added, undue encouragement) by which a man might save his life in just such an emergency as had now arisen. Briefly, it amounted to this: water admitted into the hull of a submarine will rise until the pressure of the air inside equalises the pressure of the water outside: this providing the air cannot escape. A sudden opening in the upper part of the shell would release the pent-up air in the form of a gigantic bubble; this, rushing surface-wards, would carry with it an object lighter than an equal volume of water—such, for

Digitized by Google

instance, as a live man. It was his idea, then, to admit the water as high as it would rise, open the iron hatchway through which torpedoes were lowered into the submarine, and thus escape in the consequent evulsion of imprisoned air. It was a desperate plan, but granted ideal conditions and unfailing luck, there was no reason why *it* should not succeed. In this case the conditions for putting it into execution were, unfortunately, the reverse of ideal.

The water spurted through the strained joints in the plating and through the voicepipes that connected the flooded forepart with the engine-room. With it came an additional menace in the form of chlorine gas, generated by the contact of salt water with the batteries; the effect of this gas on human beings was fully appreciated by the Germans when they adopted it in the manufacture of asphyxiating shells. . . .

To ensure a rapid exit the heavy torpedo-hatch had to be disconnected from its hinges and securing bars, and it could only be reached from the top of the engines. The water was rising steadily, and the heat given off by the slowly cooling engines can be better imagined than described. Grasping a heavy spanner in his hand, the prisoner climbed up into this inferno and began his fight for life.

His first attempt to remove the securings of the hatch was frustrated by the weight of the water on the upper surface of the submarine; this would be ultimately overcome by the air pressure inside, but

Digitized by Google

not till the water had risen considerably. Every moment's delay increased the gas and some faster means of flooding the compartment had to be devised. The man climbed down and tried various methods, groping about in the choking darkness, diving below the scummy surface of the slowly rising tide to feel for half-forgotten valves. In the course of this he came in contact with the switchboard of the dynamo and narrowly escaped electrocution.

Shaken by the shock, and half suffocated by the gas, he eventually succeeded in admitting a quicker flow of water; the internal pressure lifted the hatch off its seating sufficiently to enable him to knock off the securings. The water still rose, but thinking that he now had sufficient pressure accumulated, he made his first bid for freedom. Three times he succeeded in raising the hatch, but not sufficiently to allow him to pass: each time the air escaped and each time the hatch fell again before he could get through.

More pressure was needed, which meant that more water would have to be admitted from the fore-compartment, and with it unfortunately more gas. First of all, however, the hatch had to be secured again. The man dived to the bottom of the boat and found the securing clips, swam up with them and secured the hatch once more. Then he opened the deadlight between the two compartments a little way, increased the inrush of water, and climbing back on to the top of the engines knocked the bolts away.

As he expected the hatch flew open, but the pres-

Digitized by Google

sure was not now sufficient to blow him out. He started to climb out, when down came the hatch again, and fastened on his hand, crushing it beneath its weight. By dint of wedging his shoulder beneath the hatch he succeeded in finally releasing his hand and allowed the hatch to drop back into its place.

Loss of consciousness, nerve, or hope would have sealed his doom any moment during the past two hours, but even in this bitter extremity his indomitable courage refused to be beaten. Gassed, electrocuted, maimed, cornered like a rat in a hole, he rallied all his faculties for a final desperate effort. Crawling down again, he swam to the deadlight and knocked off the nuts to admit the full rush of water. The compartment would now flood completely, but it was his last chance. He climbed back under the hatch and waited.

The water rose until it reached the coaming of the hatch; with his final remnant of strength he forced up the hatch for the last time. The air leaped surface-wards, driven out by the water which impatiently invaded the last few feet it had striven for so long. With it, back through a depth of sixty feet, back to God's sunlight and men's voices and life, passed a Man.

The Navy-that-Floats and the Navy-that-Flies usually go about their work sustained by the companionship of others of their kin. From first to last

Digitized by Google

their ways are plain for all men to behold. They fight, and if need be, die, heartened by the reek of cordite-smoke and cheering, or full-flight between the sun and the gaze of breathless armies. It is otherwise with the Navy-under-the-Sea.

Submarines may leave harbour in pairs, their conning-towers awash, and the busy hand-flags exchanging dry witticisms and personalities between the respective captains. But as the land fades astern, of necessity their ways part; it is a rule of the game in the Submarine Service that you do your work alone; oft-times in darkness, and more often still in the shadow of death.

There is appointed an hour and a day when each boat should return. After that there is a margin, during which a boat might return; it is calculated to cover every conceivable contingency; and as the days pass, and the slow hours drag their way round the wardroom clock on board the Submarine Depot Ship, the silences round the fireplace grow longer and there is a tendency in men's minds to remember little things. Thus he looked or lit a pipe: scooped the pool at poker: held his dog's head between his hands and laughed. . . . After that a typewritten list of names is pinned on the wall of the little chapel ashore, and here and there among the rows of quiet houses on the hill some white-faced woman folds up empty garments and slowly begins to pack. . . . That is all. From first to last, utter silence and the Unknown.

Digitized by Google

In this way has been begotten a tradition peculiar to the Navy-under-the-Sea. In the parent Navy it is not meet to talk "shop" out of working hours; in the Navy-under-the-Sea every aspect of life is a jest; but neither in seriousness nor in jest does one refer to Death.

A certain lieutenant in command of a British submarine was returning from patrol in waters frequented by German men-of-war, when he rescued the crew of a Danish steamer torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine. It was blowing a gale and his timely intervention saved the lives of the castaways.

The Depot Wardroom listened to the tale and approved. It even warned the hero that he might find himself the possessor of a pair of presentation binoculars if he weren't careful. The hero expressed his views on that aspect of the affair (they need not be repeated here) and straightway forgot the incident.

He was on his way back from his next spell of patrol work a few weeks later when he again encountered in an open boat the crew of another torpedoed ship. They were Dutch this time, and they had been pulling for nineteen hours in a winter gale, so that their hands were flayed to the bone. These he also rescued and brought back with him to the base; thence they were sent in comfort to their native land to reflect at leisure on Germany's methods

Digitized by Google

of conducting submarine warfare, as compared with those of Great Britain.

A few days later a deputation of his brother submarine captains summoned the hero to the ward-room (what time the sun had risen over the fore-yard), and there, to the accompaniment of cocktails and an illuminated address, solemnly presented him with a pair of binoculars subtly fashioned out of beer-bottles: in the wording of the gunner's supply note that accompanied them "complete in case, tin, black-japanned." That all things might be done decently and in order, the recipient was bidden to sign an official receipt-note for the same.

Now the moral of this may appear a trifle obscure; but it serves to illustrate the attitude towards life of the Navy-under-the-Sea. The lives of these defenceless victims of Hunnish brutality had been saved—therefore the occasion demanded not heroics, but high mirth. The hero of the affair admits to having partly missed the joke. But this may be accounted for by the fact that the binoculars were empty, and that later on, when presented with his monthly mess-bill, he discovered that the official receipt which bore his signature included the cocktails ordered by the deputation during the presentation ceremony. So much for the Jest of Life.

There is a private magazine which appears monthly in a certain east-coast port; it is edited by a submarine officer, written by submarine officers, and its circulation is confined chiefly to the Navy-

Digitized by Google

under-the-Sea; but it affords the truest and clearest insight that can be obtained of the psychology of the Submarine Service.

The success of a publication of this nature depends upon raw personalities—indeed there is very little other "copy" obtainable; the readers demand it voraciously, and the victims chuckle and tear off the editor's trousers in the smoking-room. Month by month, as you turn the witty pages, familiar names reappear, derided, scandalously libelled, mercilessly chaffed to make the mirth of the Mess. Then abruptly a name appears no more.

> "Art called away to the north,
> Old sea-dog? Yet, ere you depart,
> Clasp once more this hand held forth. . . .
> Good-bye! God bless your dear old heart!"

The above lines are quoted from the magazine in question, with the editor's permission, and in reverent memory of a very gallant officer, to sum up, as no prose could, the attitude towards Death of these "gentlemen unafraid."

It happened that another of Britain's little wet ships went into the northern mists and returned no more. As was the custom, a brother officer of the Submarine Service went ashore to tell the tale to the wife of her commanding officer, returning from the task white and silent.

A few months later the officers of the flotilla to which the boat had belonged were asked to elect a sponsor for the little son of their dead comrade.

Digitized by Google

Now since the life of any one of them was no very certain pledge, they chose three: of whom one was the best boxer, another the best footballer, and the third owned the lowest golf handicap in their community. In due course the boy was destined to become a submarine officer also, and it behoved the Submarine Service to see that he was brought up in such a way as to be best fitted for that service, sure of hand and heart and eye.

Thus in life and death the spirit of the Navy-under-the-Sea endures triumphant. Prating they leave to others, content to follow their unseen ways in silence and honour. Whoever goes among them for a while learns many lessons; but chiefly perhaps they make it clear that the best of Life is its humour, and of Death the worst is but a brief forgetting. . . .

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

The Port Look-out

THERE is a tendency among some people to regard war as a morally uplifting pursuit. Because a man fights in the cause of right and freedom, it is believed by quite a large section of those

Digitized by Google

who don't fight that he goes about the business in a completely regenerate spirit, unhampered by any of the human failings that were apt to beset him in pre-war days. Be that as it may, Able Seaman Pettigrew, wearer of no good conduct badges and incorrigible leave-breaker in peace-time, remained in war merely Able Seaman Pettigrew, leave-breaker, and still minus good conduct badges.

He stood at the door of a London public-house, contemplating the night distastefully. The wind howled down the muddy street, and the few lamps casting smears of yellow light at intervals along the thoroughfare only served to illuminate the driving rain. His leave expired at 7 a.m. the following morning, and he had just time to catch the last train to Portsmouth that night. To do Mr. Pettigrew justice, he had completed the first stage of his journey—the steps of the public-house—with that laudable end in view. Here, however, he faltered, and as he faltered he remembered a certain hospitable lady of his acquaintance who lived south of the river.

"To 'ell!" said Mr. Pettigrew recklessly, and swung himself into a passing bus. As he climbed the steps he noted that it passed Waterloo station, and for an instant the flame of good intent, temporarily dowsed, flickered into life again. His ship, he remembered, was under sailing orders. He found himself alone on top of the bus, and walked forward to the front left-hand seat. For a moment he stood there, gripping the rail and peering ahead

Digitized by Google

through the stinging rain while the bus lurched and skidded on its way through deserted streets. Then his imagination, quickened somewhat by hot whisky and water, obliterated the impulse of conscience. He saw himself twenty-four hours later, standing thus as port look-out on board his destroyer, peering ahead through the drenching spray, gripping the rail with numbed hands. . . .

"Oh—to *'ell!*" said Mr. Pettigrew again, and sitting down gave himself up sullenly to amorous anticipation. . . .

He was interrupted by a girl's voice at his elbow.

"Fare, please."

He turned his head, and saw it was the conductress, a slim, compact figure swaying easily to the lurch of the vehicle. Her fingers touched his as she handed him the ticket, and they were bitterly cold.

"Nice night, ain't it?" said Mr. Pettigrew.

"Not 'arf," said the girl philosophically. "But there! it ain't so bad for us 's what it is for them boys in the trenches."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pettigrew archly. "Them boys —*'im*, you means."

The girl shook her head swiftly. Seen in the gleam of a passing lamp, her face was pretty, and glistening with rain. "Not me," she said. "There was two—my brothers—but they went West. There's only me left . . . carryin' on." The bus lurched violently, causing the little conductress to

Digitized by Google

lose her balance, and her weight rested momentarily against Mr. Pettigrew's shoulder. She recovered her equilibrium instantly without self-consciousness, and stood looking absently ahead into the darkness.

"That's what we've all got to do, ain't it?" she said—"do our bit. . . ."

She jingled the coppers in her bag, and turned abruptly.

Mr. Pettigrew watched the trim, self-respecting little figure till it vanished down the steps.

"Oh, 'ell!" he groaned, as imperious flesh and immortal spirit awoke to renew the unending combat.

Five minutes later the conductress reappeared at Mr. Pettigrew's shoulder.

"Waterloo," she said. "That's where all you boys gets off, ain't it . . .? You're for Portsmouth, I s'pose?"

"That's right," said Mr. Pettigrew. He jerked to his feet, gripping his bundle, and made for the steps with averted head. "'Night," he said brusquely. The bus slowed and stopped.

"Good luck," said the girl.

. . . . . .

The port look-out gripped the bridge-rail to steady himself, and stared out through the driving spray and the darkness as the destroyer thrashed her way down Channel. He was chosen for the trick because of his eyesight. "I gotter eye like a adjective 'awk," Mr. Pettigrew was wont to admit in his

Digitized by Google

more expansive moments, and none gainsaid him the length and breadth of the destroyer's mess-deck. None gainsaid him on the bridge that night when suddenly he wheeled inboard and bawled at the full strength of his lungs:

"Objec' on the port bow, sir!"

There was an instant's pause; a confused shouting of orders, a vision of the coxswain struggling at the kicking wheel as the helm went over, and a man's clear voice saying—"By God! we've got her!"

Then came the stunning shock of the impact, the grinding crash of blunt metal shearing metal, more shouts, faces seen white for an instant against the dark waters, something scraping past the side of the forecastle, and finally a dull explosion aft.

"Rammed a submarine and sunk the perisher!" shouted the yeoman in Mr. Pettigrew's ear. "Wake up! what the 'ell's up—are ye dazed?"

Mr. Pettigrew was considerably more dazed when he was sent for the following day in harbour by his captain. From force of custom on obeying such summonses, the ship's black sheep removed his cap.[1]

"Put your damned cap on," said the lieutenant-commander. Mr. Pettigrew replaced his cap. "Now shake hands." Mr. Pettigrew shook hands. "Now go on leave." Mr. Pettigrew obeyed.

. . . . . .

For forty minutes the policeman on duty outside

[1] By the ancient custom of the Navy a defaulter removes his cap when his case is investigated by the captain.

Digitized by Google

Waterloo Station had been keeping under observation a rather dejected-looking bluejacket carrying a bundle, and standing at the corner scrutinising the buses as they passed. Finally, with deliberate measured tread he approached the man of the sea.

"What bus do you want, mate?"

Mr. Pettigrew enlightened him as to the number.

"There's been four of that number gone past while you was standin' 'ere," said the policeman, not without suspicion in his tones.

"I'm very partickler about buses," said Mr. Pettigrew coldly.

"Well," said the constable, "'ere's another one."

The sailor waited till it slowed up abreast of them. His blue eyes were cocked on the rear end.

"An' *this* 'ere's the right one," said Mr. Pettigrew.

He stepped briskly into the roadway, ran half a dozen paces, and swung himself on to the footboard beside the conductress.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

The Survivor

". . . And regrets to report only one survivor."—*Admiralty Announcement.*

THE glass dropped another point, and the captain of the cruiser glanced for the hundredth time from the lowering sky to the two destroyers labouring stubbornly in the teeth of the gale on either beam. Then he gave an order to the yeoman of signals, who barked its repetition to the shelter-deck where the little group of signalmen stamped their feet and blew on their numbed fingers in the lee of the flag-lockers. Two of the group scuffled

Digitized by Google

round the bright-coloured bunting: the clips of the halliards snapped a hoist together, and vivid against the grey sky the signal went bellying and fluttering to the masthead.

The figures on the bridges of the destroyers wiped the stinging spray from their swollen eyelids and read the message of comfort.

"Return to base. Weather conditions threatening."

They surveyed their battered bridges and forecastles, their stripped, streaming decks and guns' crews; they thought of hot food, warm bunks, dry clothing, and all the sordid creature comforts for which soul and body yearn so imperiously after three years of North Sea warfare. Their answering pendants fluttered acknowledgment, and they swung round on the path for home, praising Allah who had planted in the brain of the cruiser captain a consideration for the welfare of his destroyer screen.

"If this is what they call 'threatening,' " observed the senior officer of the two boats, as his command clove shuddering through the jade-green belly of a mountainous sea, flinging the white entrails broadcast, "if this is merely threatening I reckon it's about time someone said 'Home, James!' "

His first lieutenant said nothing. He had spent three winters in these grey wastes, and he knew the significance of that unearthly clear visibility and the inky clouds banked ahead to the westward. But

Digitized by Google

presently he looked up from the chart and nodded towards the menace in the western sky. "That's snow," he said. "It ought to catch us about the time we shall make Scaw Dhu light."

"We'll hear the fog buoy all right," said the captain.

"If the pipes ain't frozen," was the reply. "It's perishing cold." He ran a gauntletted hand along the rail and extended a handful of frozen spray. "That's salt—*and* frozen. . . ."

The snow came as he had predicted, but rather sooner. It started with great whirling flakes like feathers about a gull's nesting-place, a soundless ethereal vanguard of the storm, growing momentarily denser. The wind, from a temporary lull, reawakened with a roar. The air became a vast witch's cauldron of white and brown specks, seething before the vision in a veritable Bacchanal of Atoms. Sight became a lost sense: time, space, and feeling were overwhelmed by that shrieking fury of snow and frozen spray thrashing pitilessly about the homing grey hulls and the bowed heads of the men who clung to the reeling bridges.

The grey, white-crested seas raced hissing alongside and, as the engine-room telegraphs rang again and again for reduced speed, overtook and passed them. Out of the welter of snow and spray the voices of the leadsmen chanting soundings reached the ears of those inboard as the voice of a doctor

Digitized by Google

reaches a patient in delirium, fruitlessly reassuring. . . .

Number Three of the midship gun on board the leading destroyer turned for the comfort of his soul from the contemplation of the pursuing seas to the forebridge, but snow-flakes blotted it from view. Providence, as he was accustomed to visualise it in the guise of a red-cheeked lieutenant-commander, had vanished from his ken. Number Three drew his hands from his pockets, and raising them to his mouth leaned towards the gunlayer. The gunlayer was also staring forward as if his vision had pierced that whirling grey curtain and was contemplating something beyond it, infinitely remote. . . . There was a concentrated intensity in his expression not unlike that of a dog when he raises his head from his paws and looks towards a closed door.

" 'Ere," bawled Number Three, seeking comradeship in an oppressive, indefinable loneliness. " 'Ow about it—eh? . . ." The wind snatched at the meaningless words and beat them back between his chattering teeth.

The wind backed momentarily, sundering the veil of whirling obscurity. Through this rent towered a wall of rock, streaked all about with driven snow, at the foot of which breakers beat themselves into a smoking yeast of fury. Gulls were wailing overhead. Beneath their feet the engine room gongs clanged madly.

Then they struck.

Digitized by Google

The foremost destroyer checked on the shoulder of a great roller as if incredulous: shuddered: struck again and lurched over. A mountainous sea engulfed her stern and broke thundering against the after-funnel. Steam began to pour in dense hissing clouds from the engine-room hatchways and exhausts. Her consort swept past with screeching syren, helpless in the grip of the backwash for all her thrashing propellers that strove to check her headlong way. She too struck and recoiled: sagged in the trough of two stupendous seas, and plunged forward again. . . . Number Three, clinging to the greasy breech-block of his gun, clenched his teeth at the sound of that pitiless grinding which seemed as if it would never end. . . .

Of the ensuing horror he missed nothing, yet saw it all with a wondering detachment. A wave swept him off his feet against a funnel stay, and receding, left him clinging to it like a twist of waterlogged straw. Hand over hand he crawled higher, and finally hung dangling six feet above the highest wave, legs and arms round about the wire stay. He saw the forecastle break off like a stick of canteen chocolate and vanish into the smother. The other destroyer had disappeared. Beneath him, waist deep in boiling eddies, he saw men labouring about a raft, and had a vision of their upturned faces as they were swept away. The thunder of the surf on the beaches close at hand drowned the few shouts and cries that sounded. The wire from which he dan-

Digitized by Google

gled jarred and twanged like a banjo-string, as the triumphant seas beat the soul out of the wreck beneath him.

A funnel-stay parted, and amid clouds of smoke and steam the funnel slowly began to list over the side. Number Three of the midship gun clung swaying like a wind-tossed branch above the maelstrom of seething water till a wave drove over the already-unrecognisable hull of the destroyer, leaped hungrily at the dangling human figure and tore him from his hold.

Bitterly cold water and a suffocating darkness engulfed him. Something clawed at his face and fastened on to his shoulder; he wrenched himself free from the nerveless clutch without ruth or understanding; his booted heel struck a yielding object as he struggled surfaceward, kicking wildly like a swimming frog . . . the blackness became streaked with grey light and pinpoints of fire. Number Three had a conviction that unless the next few strokes brought him to the surface it would be too late. Then abruptly the clamour of the wind and sea, and the shriek of the circling gulls smote his ears again. He was back on the surface once more, gulping greedy lungfuls of air.

A wave caught him and hurled him forward on its crest, spread-eagled, feebly continuing the motions of a swimmer. It spent itself, and to husband his strength the man turned on his back, moving his head from side to side to take in his surroundings.

Digitized by Google

He was afloat (he found it surpisingly easy to keep afloat) inside a narrow bay. On both sides the black cliffs rose, all streaked with snow, out of a thunderous welter of foam. The tide sobbed and lamented in the hollows of unseen caverns, or sluiced the length of a ledge to plash in cascades down the face of the cliff.

The snow had abated, and in the gathering dusk the broken water showed ghostly white. To seaward the gale drove the smoking rollers in successive onslaughts against the reef where the battered remains of the two destroyers lay. All about the distorted plating and tangle of twisted stanchions the surf broke as if in a fury of rapine and destruction. . . .

Another wave gripped him and rushed him shoreward again. The thunder of the surf redoubled. "Hi! hi! hi! hi!" screeched the storm-tossed gulls. Number Three of the midship gun abandoned his efforts to swim and covered his face with his soggy sleeve. It was well not to look ahead. The wave seemed to be carrying him towards the cliffs at the speed of an express train. He wondered if the rocks would hurt much, beating out his life. . . . He tried desperately to remember a prayer, but all he could recall was a sermon he had once listened to on the quarter-deck, one drowsy summer morning at Malta. . . . About coming to Jesus on the face of the waters. . . . "And Jesus said 'come.' . . . Fair whizzing along, he was. . . .

Digitized by Google

Again the wave spent itself, and the man was caught in the backwash, drawn under, rolled over and over, spun round and round, gathered up in the watery embrace of another roller and flung up on all fours on a shelving beach. Furiously he clawed at the retreating pebbles, lurched to his feet, staggered forward a couple of paces, and fell on hands and knees on the fringe of a snow-drift. There he lay awhile, panting for breath.

He was conscious of an immense amazement, and, mingled with it, an inexplicable pride. He was still alive! It was an astounding achievement, being the solitary survivor of all those officers and men. But he had always considered himself a bit out of the ordinary. . . . Once he had entered for a race at the annual sports at the Naval Barracks, Devonport. He had never run a race before in his life, and he won. It seemed absurdly easy. "Bang!" went the pistol: off they went, helter-skelter, teeth clenched, fists clenched, hearts pounding, spectators a blur, roaring encouragement. . . .

He won, and experienced the identical astonished gratification that he felt now.

"You runs like a adjective 'are, Bill," his chum had admitted, plying the hero with beer at the little pub halfway up the cobbled hill by the dockyard.

Then he remembered other chums, shipmates, and one in particular called Nobby. He rose into a sitting position, staring seaward. Through the gloom the tumult of the seas, breaking over the reef on

Digitized by Google

which they had foundered, glimmered white. The man rose unsteadily to his feet; he was alone on the beach of a tiny cove with his back to forbidding cliffs. Save where his own footsteps showed black, the snow was unmarked, stretching in an unbroken arc from one side of the cove to the other. The solitary figure limped to the edge of the surf and peered through the stinging scud. Then, raising his hands to his mouth, he began to call for his lost mate.

"Nobby!" he shouted, and again and again, "Nobby! Nobby! . . . Nob-bee-e!". . . .

"Nobby," echoed the cliffs behind, disinterestedly.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" mocked the gulls.

The survivor waded knee-deep into the froth of an incoming sea.

"Ahoy!" he bawled to the driving snow-flakes and spindrift. His voice sounded cracked and feeble. He tried to shout again, but the thunder of the waves beat the sound to nothing.

He retraced his steps and paused to look round at the implacable face of the cliff, at the burden of snow that seemed to overhang the summit, then stared again to seaward. A wave broke hissing about his feet: the tide was coming in.

Up to that moment fear had passed him by. He had been in turn bewildered, incredulous, cold, sick, bruised, but sustained throughout by the furious animal energy which the body summons in a fight for life. Now, however, with the realisation of his

Digitized by Google

loneliness in the gathering darkness, fear smote him. In fear he was as purely animal as he had been in his moments of blind courage. He turned from the darkling sea that had claimed chum and shipmates, and floundered through the snow-drifts to the base of the cliff. Then, numbed with cold, and well-nigh spent, he began frantically to scale the shelving surfaces of the rock.

Barnacles tore the flesh from his hands and the nails from his finger-tips as he clawed desperately at the crevices for a hold. Inch by inch, foot by foot he fought his way upwards from the threatening clutch of the hungry tide, leaving a crimson stain at every niche where the snow had gathered. Thrice he slipped and slithered downwards, bruised and torn, to renew his frantic efforts afresh. Finally he reached a broad shelf of rock, halfway up the surface of the cliff, and there rested awhile, whimpering softly to himself at the pain of his flayed hands.

Presently he rose again and continued the dizzy ascent. None but a sailor or an experienced rock-climber would have dreamed of attempting such a feat single-handed, well-nigh in the dark. Even had he reached the top he could not have walked three yards in the dense snow-drifts that had gathered all along the edge of the cliffs. But the climber knew nothing about that; he was in search of *terra firma*, something that was not slippery rock or shifting pebbles, somewhere out of reach of the sea.

Digitized by Google

He was within six feet of the summit when he lost a foothold, slipped, grabbed at a projecting knob of rock, slipped again, and so slipping and bumping and fighting for every inch, he slid heavily down on to his ledge again.

He lay bruised and breathless where he fell. That tumble came near to finishing matters; it winded him—knocked the fight out of him. But a wave, last and highest of the tide, sluiced over the ledge and immersed his shivering body once more in icy water; the unreasoning terror of the pursuing tide that had driven him up the face of the cliff whipped him to his feet again.

He backed against the rock, staring out through the driving spindrift into the menace of the darkness. There ought to be another wave any moment: then there would be another: and after that perhaps another. The next one then would get him. He was too weak to climb again. . . .

The seconds passed and merged into minutes. The wind came at him out of the darkness like invisible knives thrown to pin him to a wall. The cold numbed his intelligence, numbed even his fear. He heard the waves breaking all about him in a wild pandemonium of sound, but it was a long time before he realised that no more had invaded his ledge, and a couple of hours before it struck him that the tide had turned. . . .

Towards midnight he crawled down from his ledge and followed the retreating tide across the

Digitized by Google

slippery shale, pausing every few minutes to listen to the uproar of sea and wind. An illusion of hearing human voices calling out of the gale mocked him with strange persistence. Once or twice he stumbled over a dark mass of weed stranded by the retreating tide, and each time bent down to finger it apprehensively.

Dawn found him back in the shelter of his cleft, scraping limpets from their shells for a breakfast. The day came slowly over a grey sea, streaked and smeared like the face of an old woman after a night of weeping. Of the two destroyers nothing broke the surface. It was nearly high water, and whatever remained of their battered hulls was covered by a tumultuous sea. They were swallowed. The sea had taken them—them and a hundred-odd officers and men, old shipmates, messmates, townies, raggies—just swallowed the lot. . . . He still owed last month's mess-bill to the caterer of his mess. . . . He put his torn hands before his eyes and strove to shut out the awful grey desolation of that greedy sea.

During the forenoon a flotilla of destroyers passed well out to seaward. They were searching the coast for signs of the wrecks, and the spray blotted them intermittently from sight as they wallowed at slow speed through the grey seas.

The survivor watched them and waved his jumper tied to a piece of drift-wood; but they were too far off to see him against the dark rocks. They passed

Digitized by Google

round a headland, and the wan figure, half frozen and famished, crawled back into his cleft like a stricken animal, dumb with cold and suffering. It was not until the succeeding low water, when the twisted ironwork was showing black above the broken water on the reef, that another destroyer hove in sight. She too was searching for her lost sisters, and the castaway watched her alter course and nose cautiously towards the cove. Then she stopped and went astern.

The survivor brandished his extemporised signal of distress and emitted a dull croaking sound between his cracked lips. A puff of white steam appeared above the destroyer's bridge, and a second later the reassuring hoot of a siren floated in from the offing. They had seen him.

A sudden reaction seized his faculties. Almost apathetically he watched a sea-boat being lowered, saw it turn and come towards him, rising and falling on the heavy seas, but always coming nearer . . . he didn't care much whether they came or not —he was that cold. The very marrow of his bones seemed to be frozen. They'd have to come and fetch him if they wanted him. He was too cold to move out of his cleft.

The boat was very near. It was a whaler, and the bowman had boated his oar, and was crouching in the bows with a heaving-line round his forearm. The boat was plunging wildly, and spray was flying from under her. The cliffs threw back the orders

Digitized by Google

of the officer at the tiller as he peered ahead from under his tarpaulin sou'wester with anxiety written on every line of his weather-beaten face. He didn't fancy the job, that much was plain; and indeed, small blame to him. It was no light undertaking, nursing a small boat close in to a dead lee shore, with the aftermath of such a gale still running.

They came still closer, and the heaving line hissed through the air to fall at the castaway's feet.

"Tie it round your middle," shouted the lieutenant. "You'll have to jump for it—we'll pull you inboard all right."

The survivor obeyed dully, reeled to the edge of his ledge and slid once more into the bitterly cold water.

Half a dozen hands seemed to grasp him simultaneously, and he was hauled over the gunwale of the boat almost before he realised he had left his ledge. A flask was crammed between his chattering teeth; someone wound fold upon fold of blanket round him.

"Any more of you, mate?" said a voice anxiously; and then, "Strike me blind if it ain't old Bill!"

The survivor opened his eyes and saw the face of the bowman contemplating him above his cork lifebelt. It was a vaguely familiar face. They had been shipmates somewhere once. Barracks, Devonport, p'raps it was. He blinked the tears out of his eyes and coughed as the raw spirit ran down his throat.

Digitized by Google

"Any more of you, Bill, ole lad?"

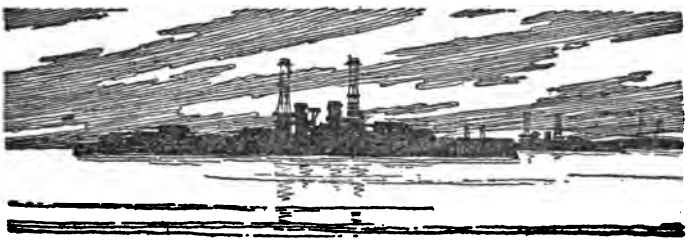
The survivor shook his head.

"There's no one," he said, " 'cept me. I'm the only one what's lef' outer two ships' companies." Again the lost feeling of bewildered pride crept back.

"You always was a one, Bill!" said the bowman in the old familiar accent of hero-worship.

The survivor nodded confirmation. "Not 'arf I ain't," he said appreciatively. "Sole survivor I am!" And held out his hand again for the flask. "Christ! look at my 'ands!"

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XI

The Nth Battle Squadron

NO propaganda poster artist with an eye to lurid backgrounds could have secured such an effect. Great buttresses of cloud, inky black with their burden of unshed snow, were banked about the sunset. The snow that had fallen during the past week rested like a shroud upon peak and headland, promontory and cliff-top, encircling the sombre waters of Ultima Thule with a dazzling white girdle. Against this background lay the Grand Fleet, an agglomeration of tripod masts and superimposed structures, as familiar a feature of the scene as the surf that broke endlessly about the cliffs, or the unappeased calling of the gulls. A little to the westward, however, where the cloud-masonry was split and reft by crimson shafts of light, an outstretched wing of the vast battle fleet struck an oddly unfamiliar note. Instead of the tripod masts and hooded control-tops, slender

Digitized by Google

towers of latticed steel rose in pairs from each hull. Against the black clouds, every ensign in the fleet was clearly discernible; but it was not the White Ensign that showed up so vividly above the strangers. It was the "Stars and Stripes" painted with the glory of a northern winter sunset.

Only a few weeks had elapsed since they arrived, rust-streaked and travel-stained, as ships might well be that had battled through one winter gale after another from Chesapeake Bay to Ultima Thule; and at the sight of them the grey, war-weary battle fleet of Britain burst into a roar of welcome such as had never before greeted a stranger within its gates in either peace or war. For—and herein lies the magic of the thing—these were not merely allies swinging up on to the flank of a common battle-line, but kinsmen joining kinsmen as an integral part of one fleet. The rattle of their cables through the hawse pipes was drowned by the tumult of cheering, and forthwith the American Admiral despatched a telegram to Washington, whose laconic business-like brevity alone did justice to what may prove the most significant message of history: "Arrived as per schedule," it said.

This linking of the two navies may need an explanation. It may be asked (it will be asked if I know anything of the talkers in this war): Could not the American Fleet co-operate in the war without merging its identity in that of the British? The answer is this: Victory in modern naval warfare

Digitized by Google

demands more than mere co-operation between allied squadrons. Navies fight otherwise than armies, whose generals can meet and confer even during the crisis of a battle. Squadrons working in unity afloat require one controlling intellect, one source of orders and information; one pair of shoulders, and one only, to take the burden of final responsibility.

Hence, to the sure shield of civilisation and the allied cause has been added a formidable buckler. The Grand Fleet has had grafted into its side a new rib and a stout one.

It must be realised, however, that a common speech between two nations does not necessarily mean that their respective navies talk in the same tongue. The system of signalling in the American Fleet, the significance of flags, the arrangement of codes and ciphers, are peculiarly and completely theirs. The meanings of the flags had nothing in common with the British. Their system has been evolved through generations; is, so to speak, their navy's mother tongue. The signalmen of the Nth Battle Squadron, blowing on their numbed fingers amid the snows of Ultima Thule, had to forget in twenty-four hours what had been laboriously taught them for years. They had to master a different-coloured alphabet as it is sighted two miles away tangled up in halliards or half obscured by funnel and (mayhap) battle smoke. Manœuvres on a scale they had hitherto regarded as exceptional:

Digitized by Google

Fleet exercises and squadron competition, intership signalese (whereby the movement of a semaphore arm through fifteen degrees of the arc meant things undreamed of in their philosophy), tricks which northern visibility plays with daylight signalling—these things were their daily and nightly portion.

In the words of one of them, "it was a tough proposition," and they tackled it like tigers. In a fortnight they were through with it. In a month the British signal boatswains rubbed their telescope lenses and said they were damned.

But the communication problem didn't end there. Wireless plays an even more important part than visual signalling in naval warfare. It is important enough in peace, and the American Fleet had by no means neglected the subject. But aerial conditions in the region of Manilla differ considerably from those in the North Sea. Speaking radiographically, the North Sea is the most crowded thoroughfare in the world. All through the twenty-four hours ships and submarines and shore wireless stations are talking, talking, talking. British warnings to shipping on its lawful occasions, streams of lies from Berlin (branded at the outset "German Press Message") cipher cryptograms from three Admiralties, destroyers bleating in a fog, appeals from a hunted merchantman—all these interspersed with the gibbering Telefunken of the German submarine.

Now the American wireless experts have been concerned principally with covering long distances.

Digitized by Google

The development of "spark" and power in a comparatively undisturbed ether was the main preoccupation of their operators. From this serene condition, ships and silent cabinets passed into the windy parrot-house of the North Sea. Here, power, as they understood the term, was negligible. The greatest distance required of their Hertzian waves was a preposterous 400 miles or so. But not only had they to thread a way unbroken through this aerial Babel, but, what was even more difficult, the operator was required to detect and read messages on one tune in a vast discord of diverse and unfamiliar notes. It is even said that an Englishman's touch on a sending key differs from that of an American as radically as the spoken accent differs. Yet, after a month of assiduous practice, the former are in a fair way to presenting as few difficulties to communication as the latter.

So much for the technical aspect of the affair. But there is another to consider: each nation having evolved, perfected, and adopted a system, considers it, *ipso facto,* the best system in the world. To ask a segment of that nation to dump the cherished thing overboard and adopt the theory and practice of another nation "likely not so good" is demanding much. That the order was obeyed instantly goes without saying. But let it be noted that it was obeyed in a spirit of uncritical loyalty and wholesouled enthusiasm by every man concerned from Ad-

Digitized by Google

miral to Signal Boy. To this the British Commander-in-Chief has testified.

But after all, these matters are merely externals. In adopting British methods of communications and staff work for the smooth working of the whole, the American ships have not lost a jot of their identity. Their customs remain, with their traditions, American—indeed, they are but thrown into stronger relief; and the British Fleet around them is noting, drawing comparisons with intent interest, as two scions of the same family might meet and study gesture or physiognomy, searching eagerly for kindred traits. And daily the bonds are tightening.

. . . . . .

The Admiral commanding the force of American battleships which constitutes the Nth Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet stood and thawed before the burnished radiator in his cabin.

"Now," he said, "you've spent a day on board this ship. What struck you most? what remains your most vivid impression?

I had been waiting for the question, and wondering what the deuce I was going to say. A man who spends ten crowded hours in unfamiliar surroundings, trying to draw comparisons between them and his accustomed environment, finds his impressions at the end of it like a jigsaw puzzle that has been upset.

I looked at him as he stood taking me in, and in the quizzical, humorous smile hovering about his

Digitized by Google

eyes, in the set of his very imperturbable mouth, in his wholly comfortable attitude before the radiator, I read my answer. It was something that had been struggling for expression at the back of my brain all day.

"Well, sir," I said (and then wished I could have embarked on my explanation as our sailors do with "It's like this 'ere, sir"), "to all intents and purposes you've dropped out of the skies plop into the middle of the Grand Fleet. It's a fleet that has been 3½ years at war. It belongs to the oldest and most conservative—if not the proudest—navy in the world. It's got the Armada and the Nile and Copenhagen and Trafalgar and Jutland to its credit, and, I fancy, it takes a largish size in hats on the strength of it. It certainly has a standard by which to judge strangers."

"Sure," said the Admiral softly, with his eyes on the far-off snowy hills.

I took a long breath. I'm not used to making stump speeches to admirals. "Well, from the moment your ships rounded that headland the British Fleet has been sizing you up. Every boat that is manned and leaves your ship, every officer or man who moves about your decks, is being watched and criticised and studied by several thousand pairs of eyes. You live in the limelight."

"Sure," said the Admiral, so softly that it was hardly more than a gentle expiration between his

Digitized by Google

teeth. He may have been wondering when I was coming to the point.

"Well, sir," I continued, "all that is apt to make a very good man indeed self-conscious. I came over on the look-out for self-consciousness, like a lady visitor looks out for wet paint on board. I've been ten hours in your flagship, and I've talked to samples of every rank and rating. I've only seen one person self-conscious under friendly scrutiny."

"Ah?" said the Admiral. His eyebrows lifted a shade.

"I caught sight of myself in a looking-glass," I explained. . . . .

Not that this absence of self-consciousness is the outcome of indifference. The American Squadron is keenly alive to the intent observation it is undergoing. Its method of showing how aware was perhaps the most graceful imaginable. For a few days it visited one of the fleet's more southerly bases, and the ships' companies were given leave to visit a great town. Six thousand five hundred men availed themselves of this permission. They were greeted by the inhabitants with an enthusiasm that might well have thrown a staider and older set of men off their balance. The traditional British methods of extending hospitality were thrust upon these youngsters fresh from a long and arduous voyage. It might have resulted in a *tamasha* that would have made the memory of Mafeking night seem like a temperance revival by comparison. Yet when those six thousand

Digitized by Google

five hundred mortal men returned to their ships and the bonds of discipline—nine only were slightly under the influence of liquor. Nine all told.

Apropos of this visit, it may be added that it occurred at Christmas-time. Now, the flagship of the American Squadron is, I believe, known in the United States as the "Christmas-ship." Americans are all probably familiar with the origin of this name; but for the benefit of my own countrymen, I must relate their pretty tradition. Every Christmas Day this particular ship lies in New York harbour; on Christmas Eve the crew goes ashore into the slums and Bowery, and every man invites a child to a dinner on board the following day. The little guests are carefully chosen. They are the type of child that would not otherwise eat a Christmas dinner, would not probably eat a dinner at all. The poorest of the poor, from gutter and dive and archway. And not only do these pathetic little guests get dinner, but also a suit of clothes, a toy, and a present of money.

For the first time the Christmas just passed found the "Christmas-ship's" moorings in New York harbour empty. She was lying at the base I have referred to within reach of a great British city. But the tradition remained the same. They had forty-eight hours in which to arrange the whole thing, but they did it. They added one stipulation that has not been laid down in New York. Preference was

Digitized by Google

to be given in the matter of selection to those waifs whose fathers had laid down their lives in battle.

Britannia, noting this story, may remember and echo the words of the greatest of all child lovers:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these . . ."

To the naval officer a ship's personnel is necessarily an absorbing study. The human element is one in which he works and lives, and whatever the development of the machine, man and his ways afloat must ever remain the primary factor in a navy's efficiency. It goes without saying that when the personnel belongs to the ship of another nation the interest is largely charged with curiosity.

I attempted to convey something of this interest to the captain of an American battleship, who was my host for the day. We were sitting in his cabin; and the talk had ranged from the Yukon to Brooklyn Yard, and was what a certain weekly paper would call "Mainly About People."

I hinted at my interest in the men not without diffidence, because to ask the captain of a man-of-war if you can go and look at his ship's company as a matter of curiosity is tantamount to demanding leave of a stranger to go and smoke a pipe in his nursery while his children are being bathed. A mess deck is an intimate place.

"Want to see the men?" he echoed, and thrust on his cap. "I'll show 'em to you." He was a

Digitized by Google

mighty man possessing volcanic energy and a voice designed to carry orders through a gale. "Come right along."

We plunged straightway into the seething life of the mess-deck and living spaces of the great ship, the captain leading; and as we threaded a path forward, men stepped aside, stood quietly to attention until we passed, and resumed their tasks or leisure. Workshops, kitchens, laundry, bakeries, dental surgery, sick bay, mess-rooms, round we went in a swift, slightly bewildering rush, while the "owner" jerked explanations over his shoulder. He displayed a familiarity with the details of it all that was to say the least of it interesting to one of another navy, whose captains claim to be not indifferent "ships' husbands."

Our whirlwind tour carried us into a speckless electric bakery piled high with fragrant loaves. The captain had flung open and closed the door of an oven secured by an ingenious but rather complicated latch. As we emerged I commented on his evident familiarity with the internal fitting of his ship's bakery. "Built her," he explained, and plunged, doffing his cap, into the sick bay. There were over a thousand men on board, and about half a dozen of them had found their way here.

"Well, T——," said the captain, addressing by name an able seaman of a stature well-nigh equalling his own, "how's that hand getting on?"

The man stood up and met his captain's eyes with-

Digitized by Google

out embarrassment; just, in fact, as one citizen regards another.

"Nicely, thank you, sir," he replied.

"Hit your man in a softer place next time," said the captain, and the seaman laughed, nursing his bandaged hand.

"I will, surely," he said. A chuckle ran round the sick bay. I had the sensation of a stranger left trying to fathom a family joke.

"Want to talk to 'em?" asked the captain a minute later, as we stopped to watch a veteran superintending the splicing of a five-inch wire by two ordinary seamen. "Here, B——," he called one of the youngsters, again by name. The boy dropped his marling-spike and responded smartly. "Where were you raised?" asked the captain.

"Kentucky, sir," came the reply in the soft Southern drawl. The lad stood before us without a trace of sheepishness or apparently aware of any distinction in being thus singled out by his captain by name from amongst a thousand other men. The captain nodded. "Trade?" "Farm-hand, sir."

It was my turn, and I asked him the question no sailor has ever been able to answer. "Why did you come to sea?" He grinned, showing two rows of perfect teeth. "Him," he said, and jerked his head over his shoulder at the other ordinary seaman wincing beneath the whispered exhortations of his instructor. "Him an' me . . ." adding, "He's my chum. . . ." Strong men have tried to write books

Digitized by Google

on all that was contained in these two sentences; most have died with the task unfinished

We had concluded lunch—a meal that commenced with iced grape-fruit (grape-fruit in Ultima Thule, harkee!)—when the captain beckoned me to accompany him on another tour. It was of a more official nature this time, and included a routine inspection of the storerooms and magazines, and I joined the little group of officers who hurried in the wake of that tall, striding figure with gold lace round the peak of his cap, who knew his ship as I know the inside of my pocket. We were a band of strenuous adventurers in search of the unfindable. Never did red-shirted miners ply pick and shovel in the first days of the Klondyke rush as that captain laboured through the long afternoon in search of Dust. Up and down the shafts leading to speckless storerooms, hand over hand by burnished steel rungs into the uttermost bowels of the ship we went; and as we passed, the captain's hand was for ever going out to run along a transverse frame or search the interior of a cofferdam in the same fruitless quest. Perspiration ran down our faces, but the break-neck pace never slackened. "Light!" barked the captain, and the breathless first lieutenant obediently flashed an electric torch into some crannyhole. . . . The hunt checked while the captain craned and peered, and then moved on. The first lieutenant's sigh of relief was always audible above the ring of our footsteps. Once as the procession sped along some labyrinth

Digitized by Google

among the shellrooms the captain's finger shot out accusingly to indicate a junction-box on the white enamelled bulkhead (an infinitesimal detail in the vast complexity of a battleship). It was an affair of brass secured by small screws, but one of the screws was missing.

"Spoke about that last week," rapped out the captain, already a dozen yards ahead. The first lieutenant looked at the junction-box as we hurried on, and wiped his face.

"Gee!" he said. Then he eyed me with mingled desperation and pride.

"*Some* captain," he said.

I dropped out of the running about four o'clock because we were in the neighbourhood of the gunroom (steerage, they called it) where I had been invited to tea. I took with me an uneasy recollection of the first lieutenant's reproachful eyes as I sheered out of the procession, but it was speedily obliterated by the interest and charm of the ensuing hour. The American midshipman is the senior of his British "opposite number" by perhaps a couple of years—but there the difference begins and ends. The half-shy warmth of my welcome; the rather oppressive decorum of the assembly as we took our places round the tea-table, were not otherwise than it would have been in a British gunroom under similar conditions; the quick thaw that synchronised with the rapid disappearance of buttered toast and jam

Digitized by Google

was Youth asserting itself over International Courtesies.

The meal (they explained that they had picked up the habit of "seven-bell tea" from us, and the lesson had not been ill-learned) was nearing its close when a sudden shout of laughter obliterated the hum of chaff and conversation. Every eye turned on a midshipman at the end of the table, whose face was slowly turning carmine to the roots of his curly hair. The President extended his closed fist, thumb pointing downwards. One after another the remainder followed suit until every member sat thus with the exception of the blushing victim. He looked the length of the long table twice, gathered his cup and plate together, and without further ado vanished beneath the table to the accompaniment of unbridled mirth.

If nothing else had been needed to emphasise the fact, I realised in that moment that I was in a gunroom of the Eternal Navy.

There was no question of "showing off" before a stranger—indeed they had forgotten my existence; it was not even ragging. It was just that I had accidentally witnessed the workings of some great Law, immutable and inexplicable as Fate, in full swing about my uncomprehending head.

The meal progressed as if nothing had occurred to break its serenity. I pleaded for light.

"It's just our mail, you see," explained the President. "Something has happened to our mails. All

Digitized by Google

the rest of the ships get theirs regularly and ours hasn't fetched up once since we've been here."

"It's the fault of the ship's name," chipped in another (the ship bore the name of a great American State); "d'rectly the bags reach Liverpool, someone looks at the labels an' says, 'Here, ain't that somewhere in America?' an' back they go. They've been goin' backwards an' forwards for months." "With Fritz takin' pot-shots at them as they come and go," added a voice.

Muffled requests for reinforcements of buttered toast drifted up from underneath the table. "Well?" I queried, still hopelessly in the dark. "Oh, well, you see, anyone who mentions the word 'mail' at meals just has to quit an' go underneath the table; we've made it a rule."

A British midshipman who draws a dirk in the gunroom stands a round of port after dinner. To each navy its own etiquette—and penalties.

It was when we had lit our pipes (the exile had been suffered to return to our midst) and sprawled in comfort, elbows on table, that the real inner meaning of this great Alliance dawned fully upon me. Together we refought Jutland as it has been refought in scores and scores of gunrooms amid tobacco smoke and the shifting of spoons and matches across a tablecloth; after that, it was baseball instead of rugger; Annapolis instead of Dartmouth training college; but it all amounted to a common

Digitized by Google

ideal, voiced, not by politicians or diplomats, but by a nation's youth in common speech with ours.

I visited the compact double cabins—only they called them staterooms—each with its intimate links with home suggested by the backs of familiar books on a shelf and photographs pinned to the heads of bunks. In fancy I made a dozen obeisances to the smiling American girlhood that has good cause to be proud of its knights: and so back to the gunroom, where one of the gay company had just sat down to the piano.

We perched round on the table and the backs of chairs, and sang. They were the latest patriotic songs from the United States, tuneful, emotional jingles whereby every nation going to the wars shamelessly strives to voice its inner feelings. And when the player's repertoire was ended we started afresh; while the more energetic fox-trotted gracefully to and fro across the narrow deck space.

Tune and words have since escaped me; but the refrain of the last song lingers still by reason of its significance in these sombre days. "We're coming over, we're coming over!" roared the young voices; and I stole a glance at the lean faces, at the laughing, confident eyes all about me—"AND WE WON'T COME BACK TILL IT'S OVER, OVER THERE!"

I came nearer to feeling sorry for the Hun than I had since the war started.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

MYSTERY

I

DUSK and a fine driving rain were sweeping up harbour from the sea. The shadows that had gathered in the folds of the hills ashore swiftly overflowed and settled down over the muddy town and wharves, engulfing the straggling dockyard. As night fell, lights glimmered here and there on the hill-side and were obliterated; across the swift-running ebb-tide the irritable chatter of pneumatic riveters drifted in gusts; and in the direction from which the sound came a few shaded arc-lights shone upon the half-discerned ribs of craft on the building slips.

Something beside the night was coming in from the sea: a ship with a heavy list, labouring in with a tug on either side of her and another fretting at the end of the tow. They passed, a mere smear of uncertain outlines, through the outer defences, and a couple of long black shadows that were the escorting destroyers wheeled again to seaward and were blotted from view.

Digitized by Google

A number of small craft were afloat in the lower reaches of the harbour. A hospital launch, with the Geneva cross visible through the dusk against her white upperworks, lay rolling gently by the berth towards which the tow was heading. Another steam launch circled impatiently round, and in her stern-sheets a group of armed marines stood watching the approaching vessels above the upturned collars of their greatcoats. The steaming-light of the hospital boat glimmered momentarily on the barrels of their rifles.

"'Ullo?" said a sick-berth attendant in the hospital boat, "guard o' marines—eh?"

The sternsheets-man nodded towards the approaching tow-lights. "Prisoners," he said sententiously, and was silent, watching the shadowy ship looming towards them out of the murk. The tug on the tow slipped the hawser with a blast on her syren and turned shoreward; the splash of an anchor let go and the rattle of cable followed. The coxswain of the hospital boat, as if awaiting a signal, put out his hand toward the telegraph and rang slow speed ahead. A light appeared at the gangway of the shadowy ship.

One of the tugs alongside had cast off and was backing astern into the darkness: as she cleared the ship's side a steam-boat, with her bow lights gleaming through the drizzle like red and green jewels, crossed the bows, swept round in a graceful circle, and ran alongside. A rope ladder dropped from

Digitized by Google

the upper deck of the ship, and a figure in oil-skins, who had been standing in the stern-sheets of the steam-boat, caught it as it swayed.

"Lay off," he said curtly to the coxswain, and climbed inboard.

A seaman stood at the gangway holding a lantern above his head, and as the newcomer stepped inboard another figure came forward into the light to greet him. He was a loose-limbed, youngish man, wearing the cap and monkey jacket of a commander. Leather sea-boots reached to his knees, and he dragged his feet as he walked, as if oppressed with a great weariness. He peered at the new-comer through the drizzle for an instant, and then saluted. A grave smile flitted across his face, lit for a moment by the lantern-light.

"Congratulate you!" said the visitor in quick incisive tones. "Are you all right—wounded?"

"No, sir, not a scratch. Ship's badly knocked about, but she'll float. Dynamo's gone, and we've only got lanterns, but you can see . . ." He nodded forward.

The visitor came a pace or two inboard and stood looking about the upper-deck in silence. Figures were moving to and fro with lanterns, and the uncertain light flickered on splintered planking and upper-works shattered and distorted by shell-fire. The air was pungent with the sour odour of wet charred woodwork.

"Yes . . ." said the new-comer, in a low voice,

Digitized by Google

as if speaking to himself. "Yes . . ." He stared at the riven funnel overhead and thence to the rents in the bulwarks. "Where are your dead?"

"Aft, sir." The Commander led the way past piles of crumpled wreckage, down a ladder, and across an open space. A sentry leaning on his rifle at a doorway jerked to attention. "Here are the dead, sir," said the Commander. He stepped through the door and indicated in the flickering lantern-light a row of motionless figures resting beneath a White Ensign.

The other halted and stood in silent contemplation of the shrouded forms outlined dimly amongst the shadows. His chin had sunk on his breast, and for a minute he remained thus, motionless. Then slowly he turned away.

"The men were absolutely splendid, sir," said the Commander, as he led the way forward again. "I—I don't know how to express what I feel about them. This was out and away the worst show we've had, and they were"—the speaker broke off and seemed to swallow something—"magnificent." The inadequacy of the English language seemed to embarrass him. He made a little gesture: "Surgeon was killed, an' I did what I could, but I'm afraid I hurt some of them shockingly. They never winced. It's so hard to find words——"

"There are no words," said the other, "that meet the case." He paused to measure a shell-hole in the engine-room casing; the clang of metal on metal

Digitized by Google

came up from the silent depths of the ship. "What about your prisoners?"

"The captain's in my harbour cabin—what's left of it. Pretty sulky customer. The rest are forward under guard. They're more communicative than the last lot and jolly glad to get out of submarines for the rest of the war."

A gust of laughter floated aft from the forecastle and the sound of men's voices singing. A door opened somewhere, and the words of the song came plain through the night:

"When you come to the end of a perfect day!"

The Commander smiled as a father smiles on the threshold of his children's nursery. "That's the wounded, sir. First lieutenant's got the rest forward, working cables." A figure came towards them out of the darkness with bandages glimmering white about his head. He was humming the refrain of the forecastle song, and broke off abruptly as he recognised the two figures by the casing.

"The hospital boat is coming alongside now," said the stranger. "I'd like to speak to the wounded before they leave the ship."

"Aye, aye, sir." The other led the way forward, and as they stepped into the dimly-lighted forecastle the singing wavered and died away to a sudden silence. The narrow space was partly blocked by hammocks slung from the beams overhead, and illumined by a few swinging lanterns and candles gut-

Digitized by Google

tering on the broken mess tables. Evidences of the ordeal the ship had undergone were apparent on all sides in blackened paint-work and ragged shell-holes in the deck and ship's side. Men sat about smoking and nursing bandaged limbs, or lay motionless with their eyes full of suffering turned towards the newcomers; a few rose unsteadily to their feet, and the stranger motioned them with a gesture to sit down again.

"If England knew," he said, in his clear, deliberate tones, "England could tell you men what she thinks of you. Unfortunately, I am the only person at present that knows"—he paused and surveyed in the uncertain light, which, nevertheless, served to illumine the consciousness of victory in each drawn face. "And I'm—proud of you." They cheered the spare, upright figure as he stood amid the wreckage and pools of water as only men can cheer who have fought a good fight to a clean finish; as the last gust died away feet shuffled on the iron plating behind the speaker, and the stretcher-bearers entered. From farther aft along the upper deck came a hoarse word of command, and the clatter of steel as the unseen prisoners' escort fixed bayonets. The visitor turned to the Commander and walked slowly aft.

"Now," he said, "I'll have your report."

. . . . . .

Half an hour later the visitor departed. At the gangway he paused. "I'll send my barge back for

Digitized by Google

you," he said. "You'll want to get ashore. I sent to tell your wife you were coming in." He smiled his dour smile. "When did you get your last sleep?"

The younger man thought gravely for a moment. "I don't remember, sir. What's to-day? . . . Thursday?" He smiled. "Monday, sir, I think it was. . . . Thanks awfully for the barge, sir. I'll go ashore when I've seen the ship all right for the night."

II

The tiny cottage parlour was flooded with sunshine: through the open window the throaty bubbling song of a thrush poured like a cascade from among the blossoms of an apple-tree that came near to thrusting inquisitive lower branches into the room. The Commander sat at the breakfast-table chipping the top off an egg; opposite him stood a girl, her brows knitted in the preoccupation of coffee-making. At his left hand, perched in a high chair, sat a smaller edition of himself with a bib under his chin, watching the decapitation of the egg with intent solemnity.

"What did the White Queen say?" asked the Commander.

"Off wiv his 'ead," came the reply promptly, in rich tones of anticipation.

"'Head,' darling," protested the coffee-maker without raising her eyes from her task.

"Never mind, John Willie," said his father.

Digitized by Google

"Let's cut the cackle and get to the 'osses." He extended the top of the brown egg to his son and heir, who gravely accepted it, and delved into its white and gold with an unwieldy egg-spoon.

"Well?" said his father.

"Fank you," said John Willie absent-mindedly. He finished the egg's head and passed on to the more serious business of porridge in a blue-and-white bowl. "Can I go to see daddy's ship 'smorning?" he queried presently. A tiny shadow passed across his mother's eyes and was gone again. For nearly a week she had been able to forget that ship.

She looked at her first-born across the table and smiled. "What d'you want to see?" she asked.

"Blug," said John Willie calmly.

His father raised his eyebrows. "The deuce you do. How d'you know there's blood there?"

"Cook told Nannie," said the child. "She said ve scuppers must have been full wiv it. What's scuppers?"

"Eat your porridge," retorted his father. "Once upon a time there was a little boy who played with his breakfast——"

"I'll speak to cook," said the mother in a low voice.

"An' cook said——"

"Never mind what cook said. Just you listen to my story. The little boy's mummie took him to see the White Queen—know what *she* said?"

"Off wiv——"

Digitized by Google

A shadow darkened the sunlight and the head and shoulders of the post-girl passed the open window.

"Hi! Here you are, Janet!" shouted the Commander. He leaned back in his chair, thrusting a long arm out of the window, and took the orange-hued envelope from the girl's hand. Slowly and deliberately he selected a knife and slit the envelope; there was silence in the little room, and the clock on the mantelpiece punctuated it with even, unhurried ticks. "No answer," he called over his shoulder, refolded the message and put it in his pocket; then he held out his cup to be replenished.

His wife filled the cup and looked at him across the flowers and china. But her husband had slipped into one of his musing silences and sat with knitted brows, drumming his fingers on the white cloth. She knew only too well those imperturbable abstractions, and the futility of asking questions. She was one of those women who have learned to wait as men rarely learn any lesson.

The meal finished and the Commander rose, filling a pipe. "Lemme strike your match," said his son.

"He'll burn his fingers," said his mother.

"Yes," said the man. "That's the only way he'll ever learn to respect matches." He held out the box: the match was duly struck and the pipe lit without catastrophe. When the pipe was drawing properly he turned and watched his wife's profile as she

Digitized by Google

moved about the homely disorder of the breakfast-table. His eyes were full of a great tenderness.

"Like to run up to town to-morrow?" he said casually.

She turned swiftly. "London!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Bill! Rather extravagant, isn't it?"

"Um. . . . No. I don't think so. I've got to go—on duty. You'd better come too. It's only for the day. We might lunch somewhere where there's a band . . . buy a hat, p'r'aps. . . ."

"Me too!" said John Willie.

"Once upon a time," said his father, "I was in a ship where there was a man who said 'Me too' every time any one ordered a drink."

"Was he a firsty man?"

"Very. There were twenty-three people in the mess, consequently he drank twenty-three times more than he ought to."

"*Ven* what happened?"

"He was attacked by pink rats and blue spiders and piebald snakes."

"Did vey bite him?"

"Something frightful. He never said 'Me too' again."

The girl turned from contemplation of the sunlit garden, the tip of her slim forefinger between her teeth as was her habit when deep in thought.

"Bill! Don't be awful. . . . Do you think that grey dress looks nice enough . . . ? We needn't go anywhere *really* smart, need we . . . ?"

Digitized by Google

The man put his pipe down on the mantelpiece, and crossing the little room took her face between his hard hands. Three times he kissed her: once on the forehead, once on the mouth, and once on the tip of her pretty nose. "Anything's good enough," he said, and his voice vibrated on a note she rarely heard. Then abruptly he released her and turned to his son.

"Now then, John Willie, come on outside! I'm going to bowl to you, and if you don't keep a straight bat you shall never come on board daddy's ship again."

. . . . . .

III

The taxi jolted up the cobbled gradient that led out of the gloom of the great terminus, and slipped into the traffic that flowed east and west along the sunlit thoroughfare.

"Oh, look at it all," said the Commander's wife. "What fun, what fun! Why does everybody look as if they were having a holiday too? Look at the rosettes on the horses' blinkers . . . *and* the flowers—Bill, look at the flowers . . ." she sighed luxuriously. "Oh, how nice all these commonplace things are!" Her hand stole inside her husband's. "Can they see us, d'you think . . .?"

"They never used to," replied the man. He watched her animated smiling face as she glanced

Digitized by Google

delightedly about her at the familiar shops and women's frocks and all the gay tide of London setting to and fro. Her eyes softened.

"It's like old times, isn't it?" she said. "The pair of us philandering in a taxi. . . . And the tuppences ticking up. . . . Are we really going to buy a hat?"

"Not yet." He glanced at his wrist watch. "No time now, I've got an appointment at twelve."

She gave his hand a little squeeze. "Tell me where we're going."

"I told you. My outfitter."

"I know: but after that?"

"Then I've got to—to pay a call. You'll have to wait. Then——"

"Who are you going to call on?"

"A man."

"Any one I know?"

"Well"—her husband threw back his head and chuckled delightedly—"not to speak to."

She shook him by the sleeve. "Don't be silly and mysterious. Is he a naval officer?"

"Er, yes."

"At the Admiralty?"

"Down in that direction." The cab slowed and pulled up. "Wait," he said, and jumping out vanished between the swinging glass doors of the outfitter. A couple of minutes later he returned, carrying a sword and belt, resplendent in gilt and tassel.

Digitized by Google

He stopped on the kerb, gave a low-voiced direction to the driver, and resumed his seat beside her.

"You haven't bought another sword!" she gasped. "You've got one already."

"Olo-piecee—too shabby. I've only borrowed this for the forenoon. You have to wear a sword to pay certain duty calls."

Her ignorance of Service matters was profound, and he had always been content that it should be so. She gave a little sigh, like a child abandoning a puzzle. The car turned into the Mall, and the Commander leaned back in his seat adjusting the belt about his lean middle. The girl glanced over her shoulder.

"Why," she exclaimed, "he's going away from the Admiralty! Tell him, Bill, he's going wrong——"

"No, he isn't," said the man. He glanced again at his watch. "Pam," he said, and for the second time in her life she thought she detected a note of nervousness in his voice—"Pam, you'll have to sit in the taxi and wait. I shall only be about twenty minutes——"

"Twenty minutes!" she echoed in dismay, and glanced at the taximeter. "But can't I——?" Then the truth suddenly dawned upon her. The broad façade of Buckingham Palace loomed up before them and the car slowed.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You *might* have told me. . . . And one of your cuffs is frayed. . . . That

Digitized by Google

policeman is saluting you, Bill! Oh, my dear, my dear, I think I want to cry. . . ."

"You mustn't cry here," said her husband fiercely. They had passed into the vast courtyard and had a glimpse of scarlet-coated footmen behind the glass panels of a door. The Commander's wife gulped. "No," she said, "of course not. But I wish I could come with you." He gave her hand a quick squeeze and jumped out: as he turned to close the door their eyes met.

"Wait," he said and passed from her ken.

Outside the railings, drawn up in an inconspicuous spot by the curb, oblivious to the inexorable ticking of the tuppences, she waited. Nearly half an hour had elapsed before she saw him coming towards her, walking very quickly, holding his head high, rather pale under his sunburn. He gave the driver directions and jumped in beside her. She took a deep breath.

"Oh, my dear—*what?*

Her husband made no reply, but laid a little morocco leather case on her trembling knees. For a moment she fumbled at it blindly, her head bent low. Then she turned to him, smiling tremulously through a mist of tears, the little bronze Symbol lying in the palm of her hand.

"My Man!" she whispered. "My *Man!*"

Digitized by Google

"GATE, THERE! GATE!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPIRIT OF THE FLEET

"Through all the monotony of its unending vigil, the Spirit of the Fleet remains unchanged."—*Daily Paper.*

A FLOTILLA of mine-sweeping sloops entered harbour with the last of the light and secured to their buoys; they were weary sea-battered little ships, and for a while they remained as silent as a stable-full of costermongers' donkeys at the close of a hard day's work. The ebb tide strengthened and they swung to their moorings in an invisible "rip" that swept round a curve of the adjoining island. One by one the cables tautened and the line straightened.

"That's better," said one. "Now we can talk comfortably."

"Talk!" echoed her neighbour. "Who wants to

Digitized by Google

talk? I want to rest. Did you see that signal just now from the S.O.M.S.?" (Senior Officer of Minesweepers). "We slip at dawn, my hearties, to go over the ground again—the same old ground in the dawn—ugh!" Her tone was jerky and irritable. "I hate the dawn."

"Hullo, hullo!" observed a Subdivisional Leader. "Nerves a bit—eh?"

"Nerves be sugared! That affair this afternoon was nothing. No, I don't care about the dawn, that's all. Diving seafowl break the surface just under my bows and give one a turn in a bad light."

The sloop that didn't want to talk had hove a German mine up in her sweep that morning, and brought it under her counter before anyone noticed it was there. She lay rolling in the swell with the horns missing impact by inches; to veer the wire would have probably caused the detonation, and the lieutenant in command ordered his ship's company to abandon ship, crawled over the stern with a queer grim smile on his face and removed the primer with a spanner. It was an entirely unpleasant quarter of an hour, and he was at that moment giving a lurid summary of his sensations at the time to an assembly of three brother captains in the tiny wardroom of the next ship.

"When I was working on the east coast—" began another sloop.

"Ah!" interrupted the end ship of the line, "that was clearing the trade routes, I suppose? Of course

Digitized by Google

we clear the fleet routes—the path of the battle squadrons!" The east coast sweeper was a new arrival.

"Very useful, no doubt. On the other hand, we feed England. If the trade routes had got foul, England would have starved. They've trained trawlers to do the work now, but when I was on that job——"

"East coast?" chipped in another recent addition to the flotilla. "Is there a war there too? I come from the Clyde, myself."

The Tyne-built sloop snorted. "I've seen our East Coast Striking Force go out past us while we were at work and be back again with wounded and prisoners within half a dozen hours of leaving harbour. War, indeed! It's on our doorstep."

"That's because you haven't got a fleet to keep it away from your doorstep. Out fighting ships have to steam south for a day and a night to find an enemy, while we sweep and wait and sweep again against their home-coming." The speaker glanced at her neighbour through a rust-streaked hawsepipe. "'Member Jutland? How they came back that evening all battle-stained——?"

"And didn't forget to give us a cheer as they passed!" The sloop chuckled. "I had an artist fellow on board the other day. He came out to paint the headlands and the fleet coming back from a sweep south. He was *very* sick."

The moon swam into a windy sky from behind

Digitized by Google

the blue-black hills encircling them. The vast anchored fleet that had dropped into obscurity at nightfall became distinct against the shimmer of the water. The wind was full of the voices of ships talking among themselves, and fragrant with salt heather smells from hundreds of spray-drenched islands. You could detect the deep grumbling tones of the battleships in the air, as the Romans might have heard the talk that floated into the night from the gladiators' barracks. It mingled with the gossip of of the light cruisers, whose conversation was largely technical, as they lay floating at their moorings with steam raised: nervous, high-spirited, mettlesome things, spoiling for a fight. Their talk concerned each other's boiler tubes, turning circles, thrust bearings, and gyro compasses: rather dull to the layman, but interesting to the destroyers in the flotilla anchorage, who were their cousins. One of the T.B.D. flotillas was unmooring, and through a waterway between the islands their lights winked and flickered as they swore and fumed at each other, manœuvring in the narrow waters.

The flotilla leader slipped out into the broader expanse of the bay and slowed down. "Now then," she called, "who are we hanging on to the slack for? L.19—you again?"

"No," said 19 in tones of tense exasperation, "not this time. . . . But if 73 tries to cut in under my stern again as she did just now, she'll get a kick in

Digitized by Google

the ribs one of these days——" her syren hooted angrily. "*Gangway!* That damned drifter!"

Destroyers are as short-tempered as athletes before a "Sports." They are always at short notice, and always trained to a hair, which, as every schoolboy knows, is a very touchy state. "Don't forget," said the leader, "until sunrise the challenge and reply is "St. George! and England!"

She rang down for half speed, and one by one the long, slim forms slipped out after her and picked up station in the darkness with the ease and sureness that belied all their abuse of each other.

The patient mine-sweepers rocked in the swell as the line went by. They were modest, hard-working little ships who did their jobs without talking about their theories and the complications of their interiors. Sufficient unto each day was the labour and calamity thereof, without burdening the night with conjecture about the morrow.

"Hope you old plumbers did your job all right this afternoon!" shouted a destroyer as they passed. "My word, we're a trusting lot of innocents!"

The sloops nodded and dipped, rather pleased in their humble way at being taken notice of. "You're all right!" they chorused back.

The destroyers were slipping into their stride and their tempers were sweetening like a long-distance runner as he gets his second wind. "Who's all right?" hailed the last boat in the line.

"We're all all right!" roared the flotilla. They

Digitized by Google

were nearing the light cruiser lines, and the light cruisers, swung to a turn of the tide, all looked the other way.

"Come on, all you fire-eaters!" called the flotilla leader, "ain't you coming on the trail with us tonight? We're the Y.M.C.A. off for a jaunt: quite respectable, my dear fellars, 'sure you. . . . You know all about our respectability, don't you—'smarvellous!"

"Won't mother let you come?" sniggered a quivering, palpitating black shadow as it slipped past, and then broke into ribald song:

> "Hi! For the crest of a breaking sea!
> Ho! for the deep sea roll!
> Stanchions down and tubes trained free—
> Ain't you comin' along wi' we,
> Or d'you know of a better 'ole?"

Irritating doggerel to anyone whose orders are to remain at their moorings at three hours' notice. The singer broke off and they all started halloing:

"Hi! Gate, there, Gate! The sun'll be scorching our eyes out before we're through!"

The roar of their fans died away down wind and the flotilla passed through the distant gates and was swallowed by the misty moonlight of the outer sea.

The boom-marking trawlers, the humblest of all units of His Majesty's Fleet, reeled and staggered and nodded to each other after they had passed.

"Yon destroyers," said one, "they're gey witless bodies, a'm thinkin'."

Digitized by Google

"Aye," said a companion dourly, "aye, juist that."

They settled down again to silence and the heart-breaking monotony of their toil. A quarter of an hour elapsed before the silence of the boom line was broken again; then the youngest of the trawlers spoke:

"Eh!" he said, and sighed to the bellying floats, "a'd like fine to be a destroyer."

Then silence again.

The light cruisers in the meanwhile were fuming among themselves: even members of the same family do not relish gratuitous insult. "Funny little fellows!" said one bitterly. "But there! What can you expect from a destroyer: neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor a good red herring. I took a couple out last month for a blow through; had to send the poor little things back because it was too rough for them."

"*Poor* little things!" said another acidly. "Their plating *is* thin, isn't it? . . . Well, as I was saying when all this vulgar interruption happened, my chief rigged a Weston's purchase and lifted off the top of my L.P. cylinder . . ." and they plunged into their private affairs again.

The destroyers remaining in the T.B.D. anchorage felt that somehow the last word remained with the light cruisers

"Always talkin' obstetrics . . ." floated disgustedly across the heave and uneasy motion of the moonlit harbour from the flotilla trot.

"I know. Disgustin' . . ."

Digitized by Google

After which, conversation among the light cruisers perceptibly dwindled.

From out of the wind-swept spaces of the North Sea as the night wore on came a murmur of voices: it grew nearer and deepened: "Ho, there! Gate, gate!"

Position lights winked amongst the assembled fleet as a squadron of battle cruisers loomed up, black as doom, in the entrance of the bay. One by one in line ahead they passed to their anchorage and picked up their berths with a thunderous roar of cables.

"Clear hawse!" cried the battle squadrons from their orderly lines. This is the greeting from ships at anchor to those that enter harbour.

"Clear hawse to you," said the new-comers. They were on a visit from a more southerly base and there was a good deal of ceremonious exchange of compliments between them and the battleships. "Hope you'll find the billets to your liking," said the latter, "plenty of swinging room and so on. Oilers will be alongside at daybreak, but in the meanwhile if there is anything you'd like . . .?"

The visitors said they wanted nothing, and were most comfortable. As if to show how at home they were, they all swung in different directions and sprawled their 25,000-ton bulks abroad on the dark face of the waters.

"Waal, boys!" drawled a voice from the American battle squadron. "What's the noos from down your way?"

Digitized by Google

"Hullo, old flick!" exclaimed the battle cruiser flagship. "Hope you're keeping gay up there?"

The American chuckled and the laugh ran round the lattice-masted ships. "We surely are," was the reply. "Say, you missed a joyous stunt last week——" he lowered his voice, for the fleet flagship has long ears. "Fleet exercises, an' we came back in the durndest fog ever. Tumbled slap on top of a U-boat cruiser; guess he got sucked to the surface in the wash of our *pro*-pellors; we were churning up most of the cod banks of the North Sea. Sir, he was the sickest-looking U-boat that ever jined the flotilla of the dead men when we'd finished with him."

The battle cruisers expressed polite credulity and congratulation.

"Couldn't see the British flagship," said the ship who had done most of the business of despatching the enemy. "But when it was all over, my cap'n—say, d'you know my cap'n? Some seaman!—waal, he jest flicked a wireless signal along to the British admiral: 'Sunk a German U-boat cruiser, latitood so an' so, longitood something else—WHERE AM I?' "

Again the laughter rippled round the American squadron. It made you think of some family chuckling in obscure enjoyment of one of its own jokes.

The battle cruisers considered it, chewed the cud of it in silence, and gave it up. "You don't tumble? Waal, Commander-in-chief didn't tumble either.

Digitized by Google

Took a long time to think it over an' then answered: 'Your signal received. Last sentence not understood. Congratulate you.' "

The battle cruiser flagship felt that the time had come to say something. "Well, that was very nice. What—what would an American commander-in-chief have said?"

"An Ammurican? An Ammurican admiral, sir, would have answered: 'Where are you? Top of the class, my son!' You Britishers are very im-pur-turbable . . ."

"Meaning dull," said a battleship in the nearest line. "I'll not deny we are. You'll be dull in about three years' time if we're still here. But I must say you've brightened things up for us no end."

"That so? Waal . . . you put us wise first. Guess we were children at some of the monkey-tricks you call tactics."

The battleships murmured polite indistinctnesses, and one or two remembered things that happened in the later days of 1914 when war was still in process of becoming a reality to their serried squadrons.

"Wait a bit," said the American flagship. "We ain't blooded yet. *You* ain't properly blooded yet. No, boys, Jutland was a game of tag to what we'll face together one of these days."

"How long, how long?" rumbled down the lines of the battle fleet.

"*Quien sabe?* That's what they say down Manil-

Digitized by Google

la. You don't know Manilla though, I guess. But when it comes—it'll be——"

"Our turn!" interrupted a clear, quiet voice in under the lee of one of the islands. It proceeded apparently from a row of low-lying shadows on the surface of the water. "We've done some waiting too." An ocean-going submarine was talking. "Quiet and deep . . . down among the flatfish and the mine moorings where you never go—er—at least we hope you'll never go. Off the Terschellings . . . Heligoland Bight . . . the mouth of the Ems. Coming up to breathe at night with a conning-tower among the awash wave-tops . . . letting the little ships go by in the hope of bagging a big one. . . . We can teach you how to wait, my masters, we of the watch below."

It was a long sentence for a submarine, accustomed as they are to holding their breath rather than to waste it in mere conversation. It is their pent-up breath that spits the deadly torpedo at its quarry a couple of miles away.

The battleships were silent. They didn't altogether like the reference to flatfish and mine moorings and depths their keels left undisturbed in their majestic passage.

A seaplane-carrier chuckled out of the darkness, where she lay like a hen with her brood under her wing. "I don't know whether you submarines are trying to make us surface craft feel uncomfortable, but I could tell you a story or two about what goes

Digitized by Google

on in the air that would make you feel giddy—very giddy indeed."

"I don't want to know what goes on in the air, thanks," said an armed merchant cruiser. She had called in for oil that afternoon, and was distinctly related to the seaplane-carrier. "A German submarine missed me with two torpedoes last week; I came quite near enough to going up into the air then for *my* taste, thanks very much."

"You're all deplorably self-centred," observed the theatre ship, speaking for the first time. She was a condemned cargo boat that had been gutted, and her interior transformed into a lecture room and theatre. She was a sort of convivial missionary who ministered to the fleet irrespective of class or creed or function. "Not to say *cliquey*. Each one of you seems to think that the fate of the Empire depends on you individually. It's not a bad spirit, I admit, but it can be carried too far. Individually you count for very little without each other's help. Where would the destroyers be without the mine-sweepers—where would you all be without the mine-sweepers? Where would the battleships and battle cruisers be without the destroyers and light cruisers to screen and scout? A seaplane-carrier without support would be a sad sight ten minutes after the Germans heard she was in the neighbourhood. Submarines—er—submarines . . ."

"Well?" asked the submarines quietly. The theatre ship was delivering her oration on the strength

Digitized by Google

of a lecture some staff officer had recently given on board her to a number of yawning brother officers. It had been called "The Co-ordination of Fleet Units," or some such title, but unhappily the theatre ship couldn't remember how it went on when you got to the part about submarines.

The rest of the fleet said nothing, but contented themselves with winking to each other mischievously. They loved the theatre ship and owed her a debt immeasurable, but there were times when she adopted the "Mission to Seamen" pose and became rather tedious.

"Well?" repeated the submarines moored in rows alongside their parent ship, and nudged each other in the ribs. As all the fleet knew, submarines are the Ishmaels of the Navy, who at sea vanish instantly on the sight of either enemy or friend.

"Who might *we* be dependent on to help us do our jobs?"

"Er—as I was saying," continued the theatre ship rather lamely, "where should we *all* be without the submarines . . .?"

"We!" echoed the submarines' parent ship, jealous of her charges. "I like that, you old tub-thumper! Where are your bally innards?" Actually she said neither "bally" nor "innards."

Pandemonium ensued, squadrons and flotillas all talking at once: jest and repartee, personalities and retorts flickering across the harbour like summer

Digitized by Google

lightning. Above it all, quelling the noisy tumult on the instant, boomed the voice of the fleet flagship: "Still!"

A night bird called in some far-off bay, and the water lapped against the smooth grey flanks of the ships, but there were no other sounds. Then—

"Battle and battle cruiser squadrons and light cruisers raise steam for full speed with all despatch. Report by squadrons when ready. Nth Battle Squadron, destroyers, and submarines proceed instantly and rendezvous in execution of previous orders." The echoes broke back from the quiet hills and died away.

"Gee!" muttered an irrepressible American ship. "Hold tight, Emma! we're off!"

"Gate!" yelped the destroyers, "stand by the gates!" and presently they sped forth to meet the dawn and their destiny. The grinding sound of cables crawling through the hawsepipes as the squadron shortened in filled the harbour they had left behind. The dark water eddied and swirled as each ship tried her engines; then one by one from the flagships of squadrons came the deep-toned "Ready, aye, ready!"

Each time, like the chanted responses to a litany, the hospital ships echoed "God go with you!" So the last hour of night passed.

Outside, as the dawn was paling in the sky, the night patrols challenged the van of the battle fleet

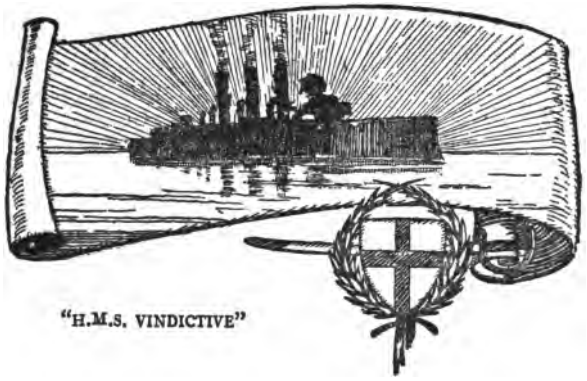
Digitized by Google

forming up across the waste of grey waters beneath its pall of smoke.

"St. George!" rang the challenge. In one great breath came the fleet's reply:

"England!"

Digitized by Google



"H.M.S. VINDICTIVE"

CHAPTER XIV

The Epic of St. George's Day, 1918

"... Let a plain statement suffice."—*Rudyard Kipling.*

IT may be well to emphasise at the outset that the forces which participated in the raids on Ostend and Zeebrugge on the night of April 22nd-23rd, did not set out with the mere intention of giving the world an exhibition of gallantry and dash —a sort of grim Naval and Military Tournament for the benefit of newspaper readers. The enterprise had three clearly defined military objectives: the first of which was the blocking of the Bruges ship canal at its entrance into the sea at Zeebrugge; the second, the bottling up of Ostend harbour from the sea; and thirdly, the infliction of the maximum damage possible in the time upon the enemy in oc-

Digitized by Google

cupation of these two ports. The casualties, considering the desperate nature of the undertaking, were light and scarcely to be compared with those along the British front during a single night of trench raids; and those among that gallant band of volunteers who did not return, died in the knowledge that they had added to history a page as fair as any the Navy has yet contributed.

The heavily fortified coastline between these two nests of the enemy forms the base of a triangle with Bruges at the apex, affording protection to a number of German torpedo-craft and submarines within easy striking distance of the British coast and commerce routes. The scheme adopted for sealing the two exits of this system was roughly as follows.

It was proposed that obsolete craft filled with concrete and manned by volunteers should proceed under their own steam and be sunk in the entrances of the canal opening into Zeebrugge harbour, and of the port of Ostend. A storming force was to disembark on Zeebrugge mole with demolition materials, bombs, and machine-guns, and destroy the seaplane sheds and other establishments. Simultaneously with the disembarkation of this force the viaduct connecting the curved arm of the mole to the mainland was to be blown up, thus preventing the enemy from despatching reinforcements to support the guns' crews and defenders of the mole. While these assaults were in progress, a force of monitors and aerial bombing squadrons were detailed to main-

Digitized by Google

tain a furious bombardment by sea and air of all coastal batteries and works of military importance in the neighbourhood.

The broad outline of the plan having been decided upon, the necessary blocking craft were selected from the Knackers' Yards of the Navy, ships whose names conjure up forgotten commissions in tropic seas and a Navy fast passing into legend. *Thetis, Intrepid,* and *Iphigenia* for Zeebrugge, *Sirius* and *Brilliant* for Ostend. To carry the assaulting parties to the mole, H.M.S. *Vindictive* was awakened from her well-earned repose on the Motherbank, and two Mersey ferry-craft, the *Iris* and *Daffodil,* were commissioned to pass down to posterity as her consorts in this desperate undertaking.

The ships were easier to select than the men. Invitations were sent to the Grand Fleet, the Home Port Depôts, and the "Red" and "Blue" Marines to supply the requisite volunteers; the Royal Australian and Canadian Navies claimed their right to participate, and were also invited to send representatives. The response would have furnished a force sufficient to block half the ports of Germany had such an enterprise been contemplated.

Eventually, however, the selections were made, and the flower of the Sea Service set its hand to the task. Acting Captain A. F. B. Carpenter, R.N., was appointed in command of the *Vindictive,* Commander Valentine Gibbs, R.N., to the *Iris,* and Lieutenant H. G. Campbell, R.N., to the *Daffodil.* In

Digitized by Google

these three ships the storming and demolition parties were to embark, and the latter was also charged with the duty of pushing the *Vindictive* alongside the mole and holding her there if her specially designed mole-anchors failed to grapple.

The commands of the various blockships were distributed as follows: *Thetis,* Commander R. S. Sneyd, D.S.O., R.N.; *Intrepid,* Lieutenant S S. Bonham Carter, R.N.; *Iphigenia,* Lieutenant E. W. Billyard-Leake, R.N. The officer originally placed in command of the last-named ship, and who actually superintended the early preparations of all the blockships, was Lieutenant I. B. Franks, R.N. After months of labour and indefatigable enthusiasm, this officer was laid low by appendicitis two days before the actual attack; he had in consequence to be removed to a neighbouring hospital, where he was only restrained (according to rumour) by the desperate expedient of hiding his trousers.

The two ships destined for Ostend, *Brilliant* and *Sirius,* were commanded respectively by Commander A. E. Godsal, R.N., and Lieutenant-Commander H. N. M. Hardy, D.S.O., R.N. The attempt to block Ostend proved only partly successful, as it transpired, and on a later date Commander Godsal made a second effort to close the entrance that cost him his life. The *Vindictive,* patched and battle-scarred, was used for the second venture, and lies, at the time of writing, amid the silt at the entrance of Ostend

Digitized by Google

harbour, a fitting monument to the sturdy spirit who took and left her there.

The Naval storming and demolition forces, under the command of Captain H. C. Halahan, D.S.O., R.N., and the Marine storming force under Lieutenant-Colonel B. N. Elliott, Royal Marines, were distributed between the *Vindictive, Iris,* and *Daffodil.* The Naval storming party was in charge of Lieutenant-Commander A. L. Harrison, R.N., and the demolition force under the orders of Lieutenant C. C. Dickinson, R.N.

Finally the two submarines which, filled with high explosive and manned by volunteers, were to be launched against the viaduct to blow it up, were assigned to Lieutenant Aubrey C. Newbold, R.N., and Lieutenant R. D. Sandford, R.N., and escorted by a picket-boat commanded by the latter's brother, Lieutenant-Commander F. H. Sandford, D.S.O., R.N., who personally organised this most desperate coup.

An attack of this nature, involving the use of very light craft, smoke screens, aircraft, and a disembarkation alongside a pier in an open seaway, necessarily depended for success upon a variety of factors. Sea, tides, wind, and visibility all played their part, a conjunction of ideal conditions being such that it could only occur at rare intervals, and then by chance. The ships and men having been selected, and the entire scheme rehearsed, perfected, and elaborated, ships and men settled down to the

Digitized by Google

long wait. The men in the front-line trench waiting to go "over the bags" are not expansive in describing their sensations. Something of that tense grim anticipation should have found a place on board those crowded ships. Nevertheless, a spirit of pure picnic appears to have reigned, coupled with a discipline maintained by the awesome threat of not being allowed to participate in the "show" when it came off.

The day came at length, and on May 22nd—St. George's Eve—the force proceeded from its place of assembly and, escorted by destroyers and aircraft, passed up Channel. It was a brave and unusual array that swept to the north-east as the light faded from the sky. Modern destroyers steamed on the wings of the columns, one of which flew the flag of Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.V.O., the old *Vindictive* in the van of the centre column with the *Iris* and *Daffodil* in tow, for all the world like veteran hound on the trail with her two puppies on her flanks; the five valiant blockships followed, each with specially detailed parties below stoking for all they were worth, that their old ships' last voyage should be made at a seemly speed. A cloud of motor launches filled the waterways between the columns, and the two obsolete submarines, with their escorting picket-boat, brought up the rear.

Meanwhile, from far and wide below the misty horizon the storm was gathering. Monitors, supported by British and French destroyers, moved quietly towards their allotted stations preparatory

Digitized by Google

to the attack. From the Grand Fleet's eyrie in the far north to the base of the East Coast Striking Force, covering and supporting squadrons were under weigh as the night wore on. The destroyer flotillas swung into position like cats round a mouse-hole lest any of the enemy's torpedo-craft should be tempted to bolt for the open when the attack began. The night air was resonant with the drone of aerial craft on the wing.

Once the motley little fleet stopped, while the surplus steaming parties were disembarked, with many a fierce hand-grip and the muttered "Good luck, mate!" that is the fighting man's *Ave atque vale!* At the prearranged parting of the ways the force divided, steering separate courses for Ostend and Zeebrugge, where, under the respective commands of Commander Ion Hamilton Benn, M.P., R.N.V.R., and Captain Ralph Collins, R.N., the motor launches were already close inshore, trailing their smoke screens across the eyes of an uneasy and apprehensive enemy.

Half an hour before the Zeebrugge force arrived at its destination, star-shell began to curve skyward from the menaced harbour, fruitlessly searching the darkness and artificial mist that enveloped the mole and batteries. A little later, however, the wind (on which the smoke screen depended for its success) wavered, died down, and awoke lightly again from a contrary direction. Groping through the white billows of fog rolling back upon her, the *Vindictive*

Digitized by Google

came out into a clear space lit by star-shell, and saw, a cable ahead, her destination. A single gun on the mole opened fire with a bark like a challenge, and the next instant loosed a hellish uproar of guns from ship and shore. Through a tornado of shrapnel and machine-gun fire, Captain Carpenter brought his veteran command alongside the mole, and before St. George's Day was a minute old the *Vindictive*, blazing defiance from battery and top, was grating against her fenders in the swell that surged across the outer wall.

According to the carefully thought-out scheme, Lieutenant Campbell in the *Daffodil* thrust the bows of his ship against the *Vindictive's* quarter and held her bodily alongside, enabling the already splintered and shattered "brows," or gangways, to reach the mole.

By this time the point-blank fire had taken heavy toll amid the closely packed ranks awaiting disembarkation. Colonel Elliot and Major Cordner, the two senior officers of the Royal Marine storming parties, and Captain Halahan, Royal Navy, were already dead. Commander Valentine Gibbs brought the *Iris* alongside in the wake of the *Vindictive* and endeavoured to grapple, when he was struck by a shell and mortally wounded. Lieutenant Hawkins, R.N., reached the mole, secured the grappling anchor, and died. He was instantly followed by Lieutenant-Commander Bradford, R.N., who was swung from a derrick with a second anchor, and succeeded

Digitized by Google

in securing it before he, too, was killed, his riddled body falling into the water. A number of his men laboured with fruitless devotion to recover his corpse, one, Petty Officer Hallihan, giving his life in the attempt.

No sooner had the two foremost brows been launched from the *Vindictive* than the storming parties, led by Lieutenant Commanders A. L. Harrison and B. F. Adams, and Major B. G. Waller, Royal Marines, hurled themselves across. The men were burdened with Lewis guns, bombs, and demolition impedimenta; the scene of the swell caused the *Vindictive* to plunge heavily, and the brows rocked above a dizzy 30 feet drop, rising and falling as the ship rolled. Yet the landing was accomplished in the face of a gusty machine-gun fire that swept the face of the mole like the breath of Death.

The first stormers of the mole found themselves on a pathway about nine feet wide, inside and about four feet below the parapet of the mole. Two German destroyers were alongside the mole on the harbour side, but showed no activity, and the handful of the enemy found on the mole who subsequently attempted to regain these vessels were killed, the destroyers being liberally bombed.

Followed by his men, Lieutenant-Commander Adams captured the look-out station on the lighthouse extension, and was joined here by Wing-Commander F. A. Brock, R.N.A.S., who had come in search of certain information, risking the hazard of

Digitized by Google

that bullet-swept mole to gain it. This gallant and public-spirited officer was missed shortly after, and not seen again, but not before he had passed on to his companions the fruits of his quest.

In the meanwhile Lieutenant-Commander Harrison led a desperate rush to the westward against a machine-gun that was causing heavy casualties. He was killed at the head of his men, and all old Rugby Internationals will mourn that gallant forward who led his last rush to the muzzle of a German gun. Lieutenant-Commander Adams subsequently returned and searched for his body without avail amid the dead and litter of the shrapnel-spattered causeway.

Details of that wild brave hour's work on Zeebrugge mole will doubtless come to us, as such details do, piecemeal in the years ahead; and many, all too many, will for ever go unrecorded. In all the dashing gallantry of that deathless assault none played a finer part than the Royal Marines, the Corps that wears a laurel wreath in its proud crest. And when the work was done and the syren eventually hooted the Recall through the din and crashing uproar of bursting shell, it was the Marines, shoulder to shoulder, who covered the retreat.

Of the retirement itself mere imagination tells enough to stir the blood and quicken a man's heart. The enemy had concentrated the fire of every gun that would bear upon the mole and brows leading to the *Vindictive*: back through this savage barrage

Digitized by Google

came the remnants of those gallant companies, reeling along with their wounded on their backs, to be struck down and to rise again and stagger on with their burdens, turning every now and then to shake bloody fists at the flaming docks and town beneath its pall of smoke. . . .

The blockships in the meanwhile had made the entrance, and led by *Thetis* crashed through the obstruction at the mouth of the harbour. *Thetis,* finding that her propellers were foul of wires and nets, and that she was rapidly losing way, signalled to her two consorts to pass to starboard of her by firing a green rocket. She then grounded, and riddled by gunfire from shore batteries and enemy craft in the harbour, firing on her at almost point-blank range, took a heavy list. Plastered with high explosives and gas, helpless and immovable, she nevertheless engaged the nearest shore battery with her forecastle gun until her own smoke made it impossible to continue firing. Engineer-Lieutenant-Commander Boddie fearlessly stuck to his post in the engine-room and succeeded in restarting one engine. This swung her head into the dredged channel of the canal, up which the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* had already passed cheering wildly and blazing fury from every gun. Here the *Thetis* quietly sank. A motor launch under command of Lieutenant H. A. Littleton, R.N. V.R., who had followed devotedly at her heels, embarked the surviving members of the ship's com-

Digitized by Google

pany and, turning, ran the gauntlet of the harbour mouth and regained the outer sea.

The *Intrepid,* on passing the *Thetis,* made for the canal mouth, which was clearly visible in the pale unearthly light of the star-shell. The enemy fire at this moment being concentrated on the upper works of the *Vindictive* alongside the mole and the already disabled *Thetis, Intrepid* was enabled to reach the mouth of the canal, where Lieutenant Bonham Carter calmly manœuvred her into position and fired the charges which sank her.

It will be remembered that the additional steaming parties carried by the blockships had disembarked before the ships neared the zone of operations. A number of *Intrepid's* party, however, determined to participate in the coming fight, had contrived to remain on board. These surplus ratings, with the whole of the *Intrepid's* crew, then coolly abandoned the ship in two cutters and a skiff. In these boats they rowed down the canal and were picked up in the harbour by a British destroyer and a motor launch in command of Lieutenant P. T. Dean, R.N.V.R. Lieutenant Bonham Carter, together with his First Lieutenant and Sub-Lieutenant, and four petty officers, remained behind to ensure that the ship was sunk properly. The seven then launched the Carley float, and in this unwieldly craft, lit by searchlights and with machine-gun fire spurting all round them, paddled calmly down the canal and across the harbour. They were also picked

Digitized by Google

up by Lieutenant Dean, whose handling of the crowded motor launch under a withering fire, and blinded by searchlights, was described by Lieutenant Bonham Carter (whose standard of gallantry may be presumed to be no mean one) as "simply magnificent."

This motor launch subsequently picked up the survivors of the *Iphigenia,* and succeeded in conveying her freight outside the harbour and alongside the destroyer flying Admiral Keyes' flag. Of all the officers and men who formed *Intrepid's* ship's company (and never surely was a ship's name more happily chosen), only one man, Stoker Petty Officer H. L. Palliser, was killed.

H.M.S. *Iphigenia,* the third of the blockships to enter the harbour under heavy shrapnel fire, followed in the wake of the *Intrepid.* The steam-pipe of her syren was severed, enveloping the bridge in steam and rendering navigation no easy matter. She rammed a dredger with a barge in tow, crashed clear, and drove the barge ahead of her into the canal. Lieutenant Billyard-Leake caught sight of the *Intrepid* aground with a gap between herself and the eastern bank, and manœuvred his ship into the vacant space. He then cleared the engine-room of its heroic complement, fired the sinking charges, and abandoned ship in the only remaining cutter. The motor launch that had already picked up *Intrepid's* crew dashed in to the rescue, finally backing out stern first (her bows being badly holed) and losing half

Digitized by Google

her little complement of deck hands from machine-gun-fire ere she reached comparative safety.

As has already been said, the *Brilliant* and *Sirius* failed to block Ostend completely, but were sunk where they grounded, and where they constitute considerable obstruction to free navigation in these waters. The rescues of officers and men were effected by motor launches with the same fearless dash as was shown by the officers commanding these little craft at Zeebrugge. Lieutenant K. R. Hoare, D.S.O., R.N.V.R., embarked practically all the men from the *Sirius* and sixteen from the *Brilliant's* whaler, sunk by gunfire. The remainder of the *Brilliant's* crew were taken off by Commander Hamilton Benn and Lieutenant R. Bourke, R.N.V.R.

After leaving the *Sirius* an officer and a number of men were found to be missing; a motor boat, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant P. B. Clarke, R.N.R., with Lieutenant E. L. Berthon, D.S.C., R.N., on board, thereupon returned, boarded the ship under a heavy and accurate fire, and searched for their missing comrades. They found no signs of life in either ship, but the missing officer and men were subsequently picked up by a British cruiser thirteen miles out to sea, still pulling gamely.

The part played by the submarine which destroyed the viaduct, and by her attendant picket-boat, must not be overshadowed by the deathless tale unfolding in the bullet-whipped waters of the adjoining harbour, and along the bloodstained parapet of the

Digitized by Google

mole. It is deserving of a Saga all its own, but until that is written, the tale is best told simply, halting though the prose. Owing to a breakdown, only one submarine reached Zeebrugge, under the command of Lieutenant Sandford, R.N. The mole was sighted silhouetted against the blaze of guns and searchlights, and under a heavy fire of 4-inch shell the craft, with her cargo of high explosives, was launched at full speed at the rows of piers supporting the viaduct. She struck at right angles, riding up on to the horizontal girders and penetrating up to the conning-tower. The crew then launched the skiff, ignited the fuses, and pulled clear, while a company of riflemen on the viaduct above opened fire upon them with machine-guns, rifles, and pompoms. They continued pulling against a strong tide, and although nearly all were wounded (Lieutenant Sandford twice) and the boat only kept afloat by use of a specially designed pump, succeeded in getting about 300 yards clear before the explosion took place. As was anticipated, the viaduct ceased to exist, together with the company of riflemen: concrete, girders, men, guns, and searchlights being hurled to the skies in a column of flame. The attendant picket-boat then swooped down and rescued the occupants of the skiff, transferring them later to one of the destroyers in the offing. The rescue was carried out under most hazardous conditions, and the little steamboat, manned by a crew of volunteers, with her fore compartment full of water, returned to England under her own

Digitized by Google

steam, and thus completed a journey of 170 miles.

One British destroyer which boldly entered Zeebrugge harbour discharged all her torpedoes at the vessels alongside the mole, and was disabled by shell fire. She struggled a couple of hundred yards outside the entrance to the harbour and lay there a helpless log, sinking fast. A sister destroyer, under command of Lieutenant-Commander H. E. Gore-Langton, R.N., swooped down upon her and circled round until she was enveloped in smoke, under cover of which the crew were disembarked. Attempts were made to take her in tow, but the hawser was twice shot away. Her Captain, Lieutenant-Commander K. C. Helyar, R.N., remained on his shattered bridge to the last, and only abandoned her when she was sinking under him.

Back across the Channel as the day was breaking came the *Vindictive, Iris,* and *Daffodil,* their task accomplished, and their names flashing proudly to the uttermost outposts of the Empire.

Commander Valentine Gibbs, R.N., died during the passage, but recovered consciousness before the end to ask faintly if all went well. They eased the passing soul with the assurance that all had gone very well; and in that comfortable knowledge his brave spirit fled.

The dawn broadened into day and lit the smouldering docks and debris-strewn mole and the motionless outstretched figures still lying where they fell. It lit the shell-torn upper works of five of His Maj-

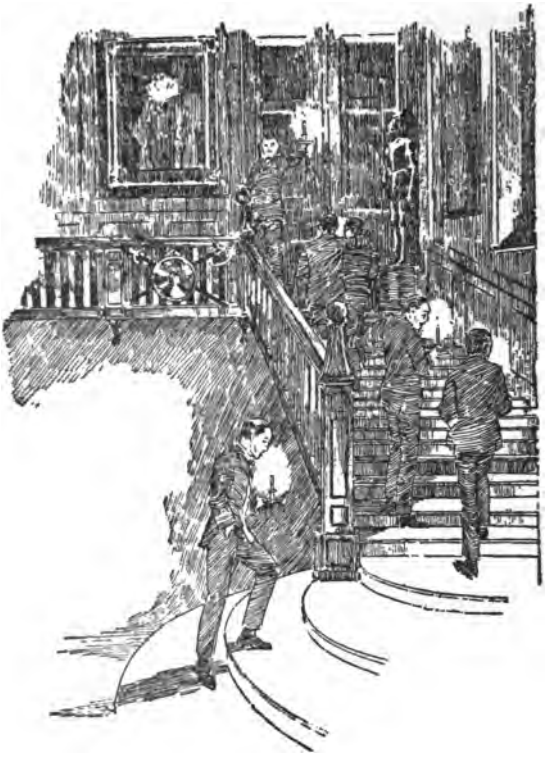
Digitized by Google

esty's ships which had finished their last commissions: *Thetis, Sirius, Brilliant, Intrepid* and *Iphigenia,* lying at the gates of the enemy that none might pass out.

To these, at a later date, was added the *Vindictive,* and though in time the enemy may dredge and blast the passages clear, though weed and rust will creep over the battered hulls, something will long remain for a testimony of the achievement; something—because of the blood which once stained the splintered decks—

"That is for ever England."

Digitized by Google



EPILOGUE

THE shadows were lengthening across the smooth lawns and terrace, and the rooks in the elms behind the stable buildings had begun their evening wrangle for roosting-places when the Ford car came rocking and hooting up the avenue.

Digitized by Google

"Just as well we didn't go to meet 'em," murmured Aughtlone on the threshold of the entrance hall, smiling above his half-rolled cigarette. "I don't see much of the place these days, but I'm expected to hold to speed limits and consider my tenants' nerves on the King's highway when I *am* here. Lorton, of course, is an outlaw by instinct"—Lorton was the chauffeur. "He's been enjoying himself. To-morrow I shall be requested to restock the poultry yards of four villages and subscribe largely to the cottage hospital, after his devastating passage."

Brakespear, sitting on the top step with his arms about an aged setter, chuckled softly. "You always had a veneration for the law, Tony," he said, "even in the far-off days when we were cadets and discussed the theory of war——" He raised one finger. "Hark! That's Jerome. I recognise his dulcet tones." He stood up shading his eyes. "They're all there—Mayhew, Longridge, Foster; where's Jerome? I can hear him. . . . Oh, there he is! At least, there are his feet sticking up out of the sternsheets. We're going to have our dinner-party after all, Tony."

The car swung round the last curve with a splutter of gravel, and slowed down as it approached the door. The occupants of the back seats appeared to be engaged with a struggling object in the bottom of the car, but gradually the turmoil subsided, and four flushed, grinning faces appeared over the side. The car stopped and the passengers emerged, disentan-

Digitized by Google

gling suit-cases, fishing-rods, and golf-clubs from the rugs. The chauffeur sat like a graven image with the expression of a man who has done his best to instruct and entertain an audience without hope of either recompense or acknowledgment on this side of the grave.

"*Nous sommes arrivés,*" crowed the stout Jerome, still panting from his exertions; together they passed through into the lofty panelled hall in a babble of chaff and laughter. "The stars in their courses fought for us. We are reunited, my children, after —how many years is it? Very clever of you to arrange it." "Tony," said another, "that chauffeur of yours flicked your old bus along to some tune. He's a star-turn."

Aughtlone nodded resignedly. "He's supposed to be suffering from shell-shock and a piece of shrapnel in the apex of the heart. You wouldn't somehow suspect it, would you? Bag anything?"

"Only a hen," said Foster, surrendering his suit-case to the butler and exploring amid decanters and a siphon on a side table. "D.D.[1] She lost her nerve and tried to nip across the road. Say when, Jerry . . ."

The stout one accepted the long tumbler. "Thanks. . . . Heigh-ho! Very nice too. . . . Yes, that was all the damage." He contemplated their host over the rim of his glass. "You appear to own half the county, Tony—don't grudge us a hen."

Discharged Dead. The official notation of death in H.M. Navy.

Digitized by Google

"I grudge you nothing," replied Aughtlone. He surveyed his guests affectionately. "It's so jolly good getting you all together like this—at least, all of us that are——"

"Quite . . ." said Foster, with a sudden note of seriousness in his tone.

"You look hot," said Brakespear, changing the conversation, himself immaculate in white flannels, with sleekly brushed head.

"All very fine for you to talk," said the fat man with the eagle of the Navy-that-Flies on the sleeve of his monkey-jacket. Only crossed over from Dunkirk this morning by the destroyer. Fell in with these—Thugs at Waterloo, and spent the best part of the journey under the seat."

"We had to strafe him," explained Longridge. "Twice in the train and once in the car. He would try and kiss his hand to all the loveliest of God's creatures we saw."

Their host groaned. "What was she like—the last one, I mean?"

"In a governess cart," said Mayhew, "with two kids and a pink hat."

The Flying Man put down his glass. "The pink hat may have been hers," he said, "but I'm blowed if——"

"No," said Aughtlone quickly. "No, they're her nieces. That's the vicar's daughter. 'Mr. Jerome, you'll get me 'ung,' as Harker used to say."

"Not 'tall," said the graceless one. "She was

Digitized by Google

much too busy looking after the fat pony to notice *us*. 'Sides——"

Mayhew glanced at his watch. "What time's dinner, Tony? Because what I'd like to do is 'strip right down an' 'ave a barf. I can't really talk till I've had a tub."

"Me too," chimed in Longridge. "Chops and I have come straight down from the Northern Base, travelling all night."

The host pressed the bell. "Loads of time. Dinner's not for another three-quarters of an hour. Have a cigarette and tell us about the Great Silent Navy. Remember, I'm only a dug-out East-coast Minesweeper—a humble country squire masquerading as a naval officer—and I want to hear about things. There wasn't a Grand Fleet when I retired."

"How long leave have you got, Tony?" asked Foster.

"A fortnight," replied Aughtlone, and turned as the butler reappeared. "Hughes, take Mr. Mayhew and Mr. Longridge along presently and sand-and-canvas them. They can share one bathroom, and that'll leave room for us. A fortnight," he resumed, and extending his cigarette watched the steady smoke ascending. "Blown up last Tuesday, and thought it was a fair excuse to put in for some leave and fix up this dinner. . . . Nerves, you know, and all that." He smiled.

"Of course," said the fat man. "Very tryin' work. We dropped six tons of explosives on Zeebrugge

Digitized by Google

Monday night, and lost two machines. I got my leave all right though, thanks to a twitching eyelid." He surveyed the company with an unmoved countenance. "Nerves are the devil unless you take 'em in time; and I'm getting old . . ." He chuckled fatly.

Hughes appeared on the threshold with the announcement that the baths were ready. He had known and suffered gladly most of that laughing assembly off and on for the past decade. "Put a nice cake of dog-soap in each one, Hughes," said Brakespear, "and have their clothes baked. . . . They're trying to come the 'Back-to-Blighty-from-the-Trenches' on us, these heroic figures from the Battle Fleet and Battle Cruiser Fleet. Ask 'em to tell you about the Battle of Jutland, Hughes."

. . . . . .

Dinner, with the mellow candlelight half revealing the portraits of bygone Aughtlones on the walls, had reached the duck-and-green-peas stage when Retrospection laid a cold finger on the mind of the Battle Fleet's representative. "Very nearly thought our leave was going to be kyboshed," he observed to Longridge.

"Last Monday? Yes, so did I. Directly we got the steaming signal I thought all was over. We didn't know the battleships were out till we got to sea: heard you chatting to the Admiralty on the H.P. wireless wave, and then we thought there was something on." The Battle Cruiser Wireless Ex-

Digitized by Google

pert chuckled. "After a bit the Hun woke up and started bleating, and we got scraps of Telefunken from the south, mixed up with pats on the back to our destroyers from the Admiralty."

The youngest modern destroyer commander in the service moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"And in the morning 'Peace, perfect peace' from the flagship and 'Back to harbour,'" said the gunnery lieutenant from the Battle Fleet. The usual weary stunt. You bagged a Zepp, though, didn't you?"

"Yes. Inquisitive blighter. You'd have enjoyed that."

"Twelve-inch?"

"Shrapnel."

"Ah," said Jerome complacently. "That was our little show. Glad you all enjoyed yourselves."

"Yes," cut in Brakespear quickly, "you flushed 'em very nicely down south that night. We Destroyers had a very pretty little dust-up."

"What did you do, Jerry?" asked Aughtlone. "We all seem to have been more or less mixed up in the affair—Foster, were you embroiled?"

The Minelayer chuckled. "Indirectly," he said, "but nothing very spectacular. We've usually got home and tucked each other up in by-bye when the fireworks start, in *our* line of business!"

"Come on, Jerry," said Mayhew; "what did you do in the Great War, daddy?"

"Well," said the stout one, suffering Hughes to

Digitized by Google

replenish his glass, "well, personally, I didn't do a hell of a lot that night. But the—what d'ye call it? —cumulative effect wasn't too bad. That was the night they sprang a new stunt on us. Things that looked like balls of fire—red-hot liquid stuff. I got a lump on my fusilage and it ran down the plane and dripped off—like phosphorus streaming off the blade of an oar in the dark. . . . I had a 530-lb. bomb tucked under my seat and I was nervous. . . . I'm getting old, anyway. Dam' nearly thirty."

"Start at the beginning," said Aughtlone hungrily.

"No, no," interrupted Longridge in a low voice. "Let him tell it in his own comic way. Jerry always begins somewhere near the end."

The stout one assumed an injured expression. "What's wrong? I *am* starting at the beginning. . . . We went up along the coast. I took a squadron of 'planes: Flight Leaders: two Canucks, a New Zealander, and an Oxford undergraduate who'd lost his young woman in the *Lusitania* and didn't care if it snowed ink: a Yank who'd been in Belgium when the Huns started what he called 'getting gay'—newspaper reporter or something—and a Yorkshire dog-fancier—a quirk,[1] but full-out. They were all full-out, as a matter of fact: good lads, especially the Yank." The narrator paused. "He'd seen a baby in a butcher's shop—in Liège, I think it was. The Huns had cut its hands off and hung it on a hook. . . . He was not so much a scientific bomber, really,

[1] A novice.

Digitized by Google

as zealous. Very zealous. . . . I lost the quirk, and one of my Canucks, but the other got back all right."

"Alpha and Omega," cut in Foster. "The beginning and the end. Now, Jerry, let's have the story."

"Hang it, I've told you the story. You know the rest, anyhow. I dropped my contribution to the gaiety of nations, and the lock-gates went. There were half a dozen destroyers in harbour, and they got the wind up them and bolted for the open sea——"

"That's when *we* nabbed 'em," said Brakespear. "They were trying to nip for Ostend, and they put up a very pretty little scrap, thanks, Jerry. We Destroyers were waiting outside."

"Not 't all!" said the Flying Man modestly; "we'd had all the fun we wanted. There was a squadron of Handley Pages there, and some French machines, and they made the oil-tanks look like Cities of the Plain before they went home." He turned to Longridge. " 'Member the review at Spithead before the war—when they had that searchlight display, all the beams whirling round in the sky? You dined with me that night."

Longridge nodded. "I remember. We went on deck to watch the performance. . . . It made me sick," he concluded naïvely.

"Well," said Jerome, "I looked back over my shoulder on the return journey, and thought of that

Digitized by Google

night at Spithead. The sky looked like a huge Catherine wheel. We made a photographic reconnaissance next day. . . ." He clucked softly with his tongue against his teeth. "Tony," he said, "that place looked like your face would if you got smallpox after fighting ten rounds with Jack Johnson without gloves."

"Thank you," said his host. "Simile seems to be your strong point to-night."

"It's the drink," said Longridge. "He develops a graphic style if you leave the decanter near him and don't interrupt."

"Where did you catch 'em, Brakes, you and your precious T.B.D.'s?" asked Foster. "We were going home when the fun started. Laid our eggs early and decided that the quiet life was the thing that really appealed to us."

"Close in," was the reply. "One Division cut 'em off and the other waited for 'em. It was a well-organised little show." He laughed. "Ever since that show of the *Broke's* every mother's son in the Destroyer Force walks about with a fire-bar down the leg of his trousers—so as to have it handy, don't you know. . . . My foremost guns' crews spend their dog-watches sharpening their cutlasses on their razor-strops and making knuckle-dusters: . . . the sailor is nothing if he isn't thorough.

"Well, that night we picked out our opposite number by the flame of his funnels, and I put my old hooker at him, an' rammed him, full bore. Caught

Digitized by Google

him rather far forward—farther than I meant to, but good enough for the purpose. It was like cutting cheese with a hot knife. . . . Then of course the matelots went berserk. I saw the gunner's mate go over the side on to her forecastle, lugging a maxim with him and howling like a dervish at the head of a crowd that looked as if they'd rushed out of a pirate junk instead of a respectable British destroyer. My yeoman of signals borrowed my automatic pistol, and sprayed it about till I wrenched it away from him for fear he'd hit one of our men. The sub was clawing at her ensign with a party of die-hards round him laying about them with cutlasses like characters in a Shakespearian play, and to add to the excitement the watch below in the engine-room, who had just been relieved, were slinging scalding cocoa over the rails into the Huns' faces." The speaker wiped his mouth, after an interval for refreshment. "I'm still hoarse with laughing and bawling at the gunner's mate not to start easing off the maxim into the crowd. And if you could have seen 'em lugging prisoners over the rail, and the Huns trying to pull them back by their feet—like a lot of demented people pulling crackers across a table! Lord! I shall never forget it if I live to be a million.

"Then she sank—just fell in half and went down. I had half my ship's company in the water, as well as the Huns. They were just like a lot of fighting dogs after a hose had been played on them. Lucky

Digitized by Google

the Hun hadn't got a submarine about, because I had to stop and pick 'em all up. Another Hun destroyer had been torpedoed not far off, and was burning like a hayrick. She enlivened matters by taking 'sitters' at us with her after-gun while she sank, so I had to silence her first, and by the time I got the last of my Death-or-Glory boys out of the water they were pretty far gone. I asked one fellow how he'd enjoyed himself, and he said, 'Law, sir, fine! We was flickin' off their 'eads wiv the cutlass, same's it might ha' bin dandelions!' "

"Take many prisoners?" asked Aughtlone, laughing.

"Fifty-one, *and* their flag. The sub told me he wanted to present it to the 'Goat' or Westminster Abbey, wasn't sure which. Some of the Huns were pretty nearly done, and my surgeon probationer had a busy time getting life back into one or two. He carried them down to the stokehold and worked at 'em in the warmth. While he was down there, the sub came up to me and said there was another in the forecastle lockers, pegging out, he thought; so when things got quiet, I went along to see if I could do anything. He was just about all-in, but he had strength enough to put out his tongue at me——"

"Saucy puss!" from Jerome.

"He was clay cold, and no amount of rubbing would warm him, so I told a couple of braves to carry him down to the doctor in the stokehold. The Hun just knew enough English to catch the word

Digitized by Google

'stokehold,' and he thought I'd ordered him to be shoved into the furnace for putting out his tongue at me. Imagine the sort of minds they must have."

"Their officers tell 'em those penny-dreadful stories to discourage a tendency to surrender," said Foster.

"Well, it saved his life, anyway, that spasm. He yelled and fought and bit and kicked. It took five men to get him along the upper-deck, and all the way he was shouting: 'Ach, no! No!—No!—No! —No!' at the top of his voice. By the time we got him to the stokehold hatchway he'd recovered all the animation he'd ever had, and there wasn't any need for the doctor!".

"What was the total bag?" asked Mayhew.

"Four—one rammed, two torpedoed, and one sunk by gunfire by the light cruisers. There were six all-told."

"But," interrupted Longridge, "doesn't it rather tickle you to think of our being able to wipe the floor with their destroyers and not a blessed capital ship dares come out of Wilhelmshaven to save 'em! There we were in the Battle Cruisers, trailing the tail of our coat all round the Heligoland Bight, and —nothing doing, if you please. Ain't that what's called Sea Power?"

"Hum'm," said Foster, and chuckled. "I don't know about Sea Power: I'm only a humble Mine-layer. But this may throw some light on the situa-

Digitized by Google

tion." He drew a pocket-book from his pocket. "I saw a translation of a paragraph from a Dutch paper in the press this morning. I cut it out to send my skipper in case he hadn't seen it." He handed the slip to Aughtlone. "I thought it would cheer him up."

"The crew of the —— Lightship report that at 3 a.m. on Tuesday morning a number of very heavy explosions occurred in a southerly direction. In several cases a sheet of flame was seen to ascend to an altitude of at least 150 metres. One of the men who had passed through the North Sea on the night of the Battle of Jutland stated that he recognised the flashes as from big ships blowing up."

Aughtlone read the cutting aloud, and handed it back. "That was your dirty work, was it?"

The minelayer laughed. "Act o' God, we like to call it," he said. "Or in the words of that beautiful poem:

"The boy, oh, where was he?"

Aughtlone joined in the laughter. "That's all very fine," he said, "but didn't any of your lighthouse friends further north observe my little contretemps later on in the morning? But perhaps they wouldn't notice a mere minesweeper blowing up." He removed the stoppers from the decanters and pushed them to Mayhew on his left. "That Zepp you were talking about evidently gave the tip that

Digitized by Google

you were out to a minelaying submarine, because we located a minefield on what would have been the Battle Fleet's course if you'd come south. I lost a paddler clearing it, and got a swim before breakfast."

"How did you know the minefield was there?" asked Longridge.

"Dutch ship blew up. 'Matter of fact, she blew up on a stray one. I went to the position she'd given us, and before we started sweeping we were on top of Fritz's eggs which he'd intended for you. Ah, well, we raked 'em up and I got my leave, so we won't bear Fritz any malice this time." He paused, glass in hand.

"The King," he said quietly.

"The King," murmured the others. "Yes, I got my leave out of that night's work, too," said the destroyer captain. "Rather damaged our classic profile, and had to dock for a few days to straighten the stem. . . ."

Beyond the open bay windows the blue dusk was closing down on the yews and scented borders. The long, deep drone of a cockchafer went past and died to nothing.

The host sent the decanters on their second round and leaned forward a little in his chair.

"It's been jolly nice to see you dear old things again," he said, "and talk over the War, as we swore we would some day when we were kids." He

Digitized by Google

paused. "And now there's a toast I vote we drink. He—he'd have been here if this dinner had been a month earlier. As it is——" he raised his glass—"we can only drink to his memory."

No name was mentioned. They nodded; drank gravely, in silence and perfect comprehension.

Brakespear, facing his host, broke the silence. "I saw him a couple of days ago," he said quietly.

"Eh?" ejaculated Jerome sharply.

"But," said Foster, "his boat was lost—oh, more than three weeks ago."

Brakespear nodded. "I know. But they salved her and brought her in, near where my ship was lying. Dacre—the submarine one, not his brother—went on board to make an examination and—and take the bodies out. So I went too, because he and I—I was very fond of him . . ." Brakespear reached for the cigar lighter.

"What happened?" asked Mayhew. "We never hear any details of these things up north."

"Well, they got holed and sank stern first apparently. Stuck in the bottom. However, they managed to stop the hole up with clothing and tallow and stopped the inrush of water: but they couldn't move the boat. Blew everything and shifted weights, but she wouldn't budge. Then the first lieutenant volunteered to go out through the bow torpedo tube. They tied a message to his wrist and he crawled into the tube: they fired it with compressed air, as

Digitized by Google

if he'd been a torpedo. They waited for a couple of hours, and then someone opened the tube door, just to make sure. . . . But he was still there—jambed. . . ."

The butler entered with the coffee, and the narrator was silent till he had gone.

"You know the foremost hatch in those boats, for lowering torpedoes?" he resumed. Apparently they decided to try getting a big air pressure in the boat, then open this hatch and chance being blown through to the surface in the bubble." The speaker puffed a cloud of smoke and watched it eddy about the flowers in the centre of the table. "So they stripped and put on swimming collars and life-belts, and mustered two-deep under the hatchway."

Longridge was tracing a pattern in the ash from his cigarette on the side of his dessert-plate. "All of 'em?" he interrupted. "Shouldn't have thought there was room."

"No, there wasn't. There wasn't room for *him* or his coxswain. We found those two fully dressed, without life-belts or anything, right the other end of the compartment away from any hope of escape. But he wrote his report, giving clear and explicit directions for salving, amongst other things, and tied it to the second coxswain's wrist. . . . Then when they were all ready he gave the word—from the other end of the compartment—and the men all heaved the hatch up together."

Digitized by Google

Behind the speaker's shoulders the blue oblongs of the windows had darkened into blackness. A nightingale far off among the laurels was pouring out her liquid song into the night, and for a while Brakespear seemed to be listening to it, twirling the stem of his wine-glass absently between finger and thumb. No one spoke.

"It was one of those stupid little accidents," he went on presently, still in the same low, grave tones, "a thing so utterly insignificant, that stood between Life and Death for them. Yet it happened. The hatch opened about six inches and jambed. They could neither raise nor lower it. The water just poured in."

"Drowned 'em," said Longridge tensely. The superfluity of the remark seemed to strike him. "Of course," he added, as if talking to himself.

"Yes."

"And they were still two-deep when you found them?" asked Foster.

"Yes. There must have been perfect discipline from first to last. And his letter——"

The speaker's voice caught abruptly, as a trailing garment catches in a nail. The ensuing silence remained unbroken till Aughtlone slowly pushed back his chair.

"I vote we go and have a game of pool," he said quietly.

Digitized by Google

The hall clock chimed one on a thin scandalised note as the candle-lit procession wended its way bedwards up the wide stairway. It was one of the Aughtlone traditions that the old house should remain lit by lamps and candles.

Aughtlone led the way, and, as he reached the gallery overlooking the hall, he turned, smiling, and raised his candle above his head as if to light the way better for his guests. They came towards him by ones and twos, Jerome encircling Foster's neck with his arm and crooning softly to himself, a picture of Falstaffian contentment: Mayhew, with one hand on the balustrade, looking back over his shoulder to address some laughing remark to Longridge at his heels; Brakespear bringing up the rear, grave and thoughtful as was his wont, his thin, handsome face white as ivory against the dark panelling.

"Hi, Podgie!" called Mayhew, "ain't they goin' to make you a Major-General in the Air Force, or something? What's all this talk about amalgamating the R.N.A.S. and R.F.C.?"

The Flying Man reached the landing and disentangled his arm from his companion. "I shall be a Lieutenant-Colonel," he said. "A Lieutenant-Colonel—me, what's been in the Navy, man and boy, these fifteen years." He frowned severely at an armour-clad effigy against the wall. "Amalgamate——"

"Never mind," said Foster. "Never mind, Pod-

Digitized by Google

gie, *we* don't care. We shall know you couldn't help being a Lieutenant-Colonel, and that you belonged to the Navy once."

"He'll always belong to it," said Mayhew. "He's only camouflaged, and one of these days he'll come back to us. The Navy ain't like any other profession: you can't suddenly become something else by dressing up in a different rig"—he pointed to the effigy in armour—"any more than I'd cease to be a Gunnery Lieutenant if I shoved on that fellow's superfine tin suitings."

"This," said Longridge, "is developing into a 'Branch-kagg.'[1] I'm going to turn in."

"Breakfast at ten!" shouted the host as Longridge detached himself from the group and disappeared up a corridor.

"And, anyhow," said Brakespear, "even if our Podgie fades away, to become a Lieutenant-Colonel in a gorgeous uniform——"

"Sky-blue, ain't it, Podgie?" interposed Aughtlone. Brakespear disregarded the interruption.

"Even if, I say, Podgie departs from our midst, the Navy remains. And if I—even I—go up in the next 'Jutland,' or Foster trips over one of his infernal machines accidentally in the dark——"

"Or I get wafted skywards clearing a mine-field next week," said Aughtlone.

[1] An argument as to the comparative merits and demerits of the respective branches of H.M. Naval Service.

Digitized by Google

"Exactly. . . . Others would take our places. The individual doesn't count.—Podgie, you're dripping candle-grease on Tony's ormulu carpet. . . ."

"I'm going to bed," said the stout one. "You're all getting a trifle maudlin. . . ."

Foster yawned. "I'm going too. But Brakes is right. What's it matter what happens to us as long as we shove the wheel round a spoke or two in our short trick?" He wagged his head solemnly. "Life's dev'lish short, anyway. . . . Come on, Podgie. 'And so to bed.' . . . 'Night all!"

Aughtlone watched the twin glimmers fade away down the long corridor and turned to his last remaining guest.

"We're a tongue-tied breed," he said. "We've been trying to voice some tremendous sentiment that's been struggling for expression all the evening, and——"

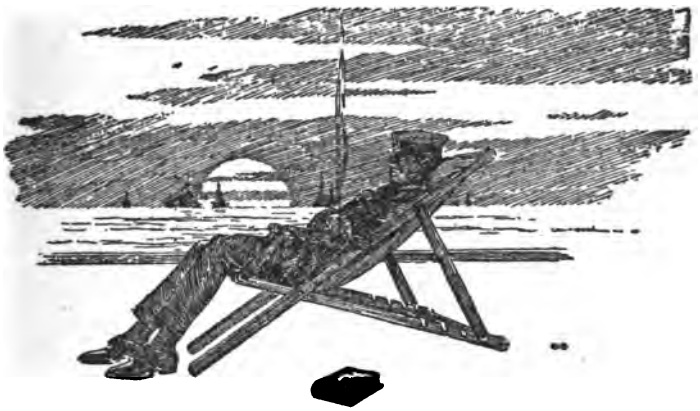
"It's had us beat," said Brakespear. He made a circle in the air with the wavering candle-flame. "It's too big. We've all seen so much in this bloody war, collectively. . . . We feel that we are the Navy and the Navy is us; yet, somehow, we don't count much as individuals."

"It's because we're finite," said Aughtlone. He leaned against the carved balustrade that swept round and up into the darkness of the great house, and stared absently at the mailed figure standing in the shadows: the light of the candles flickered on hauberk and vizor through which the breath of some

Digitized by Google

forgotten ancestor had once come and gone. "The individual passes——"

"Yes," said Brakespear. He took a step along the thick carpet and halted. "But the Navy's eternal."



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or on the date to which renewed.
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

25Feb'58MH

REC'D LD
FEB 11 1958

LD 21A–50m-8,'57
(C8481s10)476B

General Library
University of California
Berkeley

Digitized by Google